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Kaka

How the rich kid from Brazil conquered the world

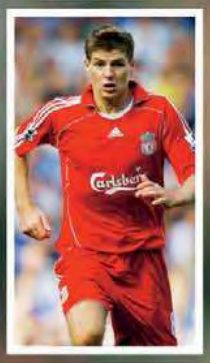
PLUS...

Juan Veron

Ronaldinho

Romario

Inter in the 60s



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CONTENTS

May 2007

COVER STORY: KAKA

34 **From silver spoon to silverware** The Milan and Brazil midfielder has become a star by allying the advantages of his affluent upbringing with hard work and natural talent. By Tim Vickery

FOREIGN TAKEOVERS IN ENGLAND

48 **Billionaires' playthings** Liverpool are the latest Premier League club to be taken over by foreign investors. By David Conn

FACE TO FACE

42 UEFA president **Michel Platini**
44 Argentina and Estudiantes midfielder **Juan Sebastian Veron**
46 Chelsea goalkeeper **Petr Cech**

THE WORLD THIS MONTH

8 **The Big Issue** Should Premier League reserve teams play in the Football League?
10 **ESM XI** Europe's best players in March
12 **Brian Glanville** The column

HEADLINERS

16 **People in the news** Frederic Kanoute, Mirko Slomka, Daryan & Jack Warner, Roberto Carlos, Romario, Emmanuel Adebayor, Giampaolo Pazzini

DISPATCHES

22 **The big stories from our correspondents** Spain, Italy, Brazil, England

TALENT SCOUT

56 **Tomorrow's stars today** David Silva, Danny De Zeeuw, Sotiris Ninis
58 **Six to watch** Africans in France

SPOTLIGHT

60 **Poland** The country in depth – the state of the game, club guide, movers and shakers

MEMORIES

64 **Power and corruption** Helenio Herrera's Inter. By Brian Glanville

COMMENT

68 **Keir Radnedge** Best of three?
70 **Paul Gardner** Robot wars
72 **Jim Holden** Show some respect!

TRAVEL

74 **Lisbon** The guide to the world's great footballing cities

WORLD SERVICE

83 **Global news and results digest**
84 Euro 2008 qualifiers
86 Germany
87 France
88 Rest of Europe
96 The Americas
98 Asia/Oceania
100 Africa
101 Non-FIFA football
102 Results

PROS' PRO

114 **The free-kick taker** Ronaldinho

THERE HAS been surprisingly little negative reaction to the takeover of Liverpool by American billionaires George Gillett and Tom Hicks. Those that have questioned this latest multi-million pound deal have themselves been criticised for being "inward-looking" and xenophobic.

I have absolutely no problem with Gillett and Hicks' nationality. This magazine, more than any other, has always been against insularity and championed the cause of internationalism. Yet when Gillett and Hicks talk about "global media revenues" and "expansion into Asia", they are not talking as fans of the game but as hard-headed businessmen in search of maximum profit.

In his feature on foreign takeovers in England (page 48), David Conn rightly highlights the profits that have been quietly banked by the club chairmen who have cashed in their chips. They should not be allowed to go quietly. We should all be asking ourselves how they were allowed to take such huge sums of money out of the game.

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Tim Vickery covers the whole of South America from his base in Rio de Janeiro. He also works for the BBC, *Sports Illustrated*, *The Independent*, Talksport and Australian broadcaster SBS.

David Conn is the author of two highly-regarded books – *The Football Business: Fair Game in the 1990s?* and *The Beautiful Game? Searching for the Soul of Football*. He writes a weekly column for *The Guardian*.

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STARTER FOR TEN

The questions the whole world of football is asking

1 HAS A KEEPER SCORED A MORE CRUCIAL GOAL THAN SEVILLA'S ANDRES PALOP?

His header for the holders from a corner four minutes into injury time against Shakhtar Donetsk took their UEFA Cup tie into extra-time, when Javier Chevanton scored to put Sevilla into the quarter-finals.

2 IS THIS SEASON'S SERIE A CAMPAIGN THE POOREST EVER?

With no Juventus, Milan docked eight points and Inter 18 points clear at the time of writing, the title is set to be wrapped up in record time. More, page 26.

3 HOW MANY "PROPER" GOALS HAS ROMARIO ACTUALLY SCORED?

The Brazilian striker claims to be close to hitting the 1,000 mark, but many of his goals were scored in junior, friendly and practice matches. More, page 18.

4 THE SPANISH LEAGUE TITLE RACE IS TIGHT, BUT IS THE COMPETITION REALLY SO GOOD?

As many as six clubs had a chance of winning the championship at the end of March, but none of them can claim to have been in outstanding form. More, page 22.

5 WILL POLAND'S MATCH-FIXING SCANDAL COUNT AGAINST THEIR JOINT BID, WITH UKRAINE, FOR EURO 2012?

UEFA announces the winner – the two other bids are from Italy and Croatia/Hungary – on April 18. More, pages 60 & 68.

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SCHALKE
F.C. SCHAL
SCHALKE
FINALE
HALKE 04

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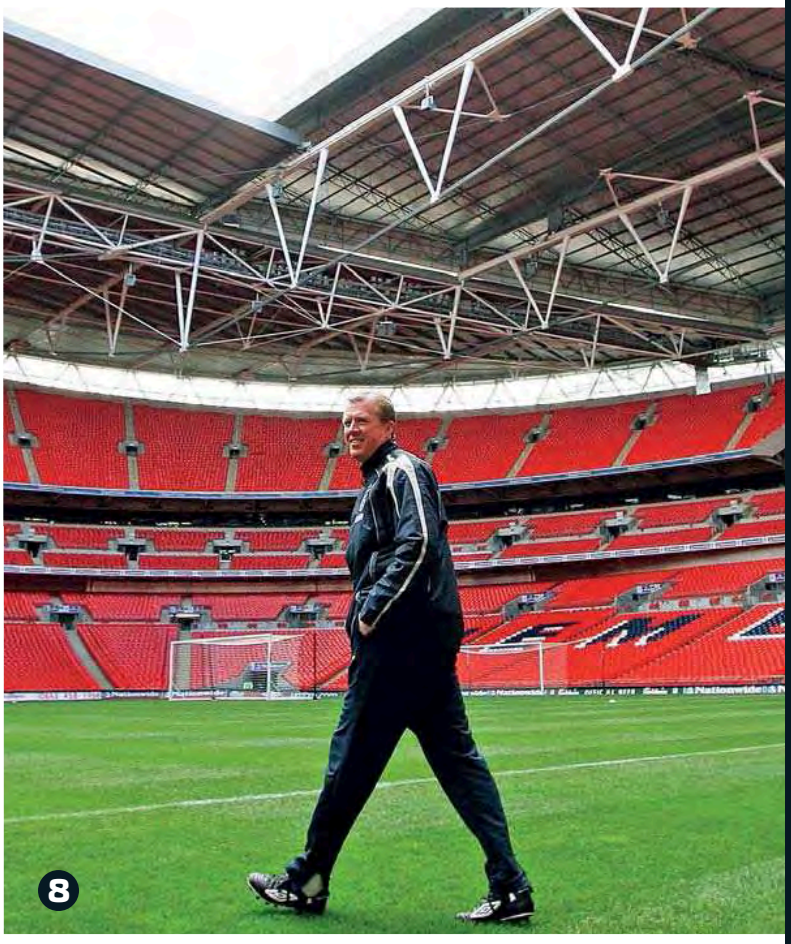

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LCD BRIGHT
VOLUME
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PLAY
TITLE
DIGITAL EFFECT
TC/U-BIT
ZEBRA
DVCAM
48K

9

6 CAN SCHALKE WIN THEIR FIRST BUNDESLIGA TITLE?

The club have crept to the top under young coach Mirko Slomka. More, page 17.

7 CAN NICOLAS ANELKA SEAL HIS PLACE IN FRANCE'S STARTING LINE-UP?

With his goal against Lithuania in the Euro 2008 qualifiers, the Bolton striker made an impressive case to be a first-choice alongside Thierry Henry.

8 HOW MANY TIMES WILL STEVE McCLAREN GET TO COACH ENGLAND AT WEMBLEY?

The new Wembley stadium has staged its first match – a 3-3 draw between the Under-21s of England and Italy – but McClaren's position as coach of England's senior side looked even more precarious after their failure to beat Israel.

9 WILL KAKA GO INTO THE COPA AMERICA AS BRAZIL'S MAIN MAN?

So far this season, Brazil coach Dunga has preferred the Milan midfielder to Ronaldinho as the central figure in his new-look national side. More, page 34.

10 WILL LIVERPOOL'S NEW OWNERS STICK WITH RAFA BENITEZ?

George Gillett and Tom Hicks announced plans to meet the manager to reassure him of their plans for the club following their takeover.

The big issue

Should Premier League clubs be allowed to field reserve teams in the Football League?

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YES

says Liverpool manager Rafa Benitez

Benitez...“18 games a season is not enough for the development of young players”

It is clear that the reserve system in England doesn't work. Here, the reserve league is nothing. Our young players may have the quality but they don't have the experience for the first team. They are only on the bench.

So I would like to see reserve teams of the big clubs like ourselves playing in the Football League. That would bridge the gap between the youngsters and the first team. Why not, if they have enough quality?

If you do not give young players the chance to play competitive football and learn, things become impossible.

You can see youngsters playing just 18 games a season; that is nothing, certainly not enough for the development of these players.

It is something we can improve in this country. Or if we do not change we will find other solutions such as sending youngsters out on loan, as I have done recently.

I do not want to see reserve teams with four or five senior men playing without passion. These games are for young players.

I used to be the manager of Castilla, Real Madrid's reserve side, and I had players who were 18 or 19 playing in the second division.

They were playing against men. They were winning and we finished sixth and fourth. The question is, what improves the quality of the players?

NO

says Barry Fry, Peterborough chairman

Fry...“Benitez hasn't got a clue about the passion and commitment of Football League fans”

The Football League is a thriving competition, with clubs that are all great for their community. It's had fantastic attendances for the last three years, and anyone's reserves competing in the Football League would be an insult to clubs up and down the country that have worked so hard to keep themselves afloat.

If you're a Rochdale or Barnet supporter, you support that club and that community, and those fans are just as fanatical as supporters of Manchester United or Chelsea.

If Rafa doesn't think the Premiership reserve league is good enough, he should do what everyone else does and loan his players to Football League clubs for first-team experience. No disrespect to him, but he hasn't got a clue about the passion and commitment of all those Football League fans. The Football League makes or breaks people's weekends if their team wins, loses or draws.

Lots of those people down in the lower leagues are the unsung heroes of football, they're the salt of the earth. They're not all on £100,000 a week. They're on the sort of money the rest of the country are on, with a wife and kids and a mortgage to pay.

If you look at all the knocks the Football League has had, with the Bosman ruling, the collapse of ITV Digital and the transfer window, we've still come out smiling with gates as high as ever.

It's so competitive, exciting and enjoyable, so we don't need anyone's reserves playing in our league, no way.

FROM THE MESSAGE BOARDS

...on Platini's Champions League plans

"Michel Platini has the right goals in terms of broadening the scope of the Champions League with more teams from 'lesser' nations. But I think he is wrong in his way of doing it. The Champions League should be expanded, with the UEFA Cup being scrapped to make room. The top five or six from the big leagues could then qualify, as well as the top two from weaker leagues. The competition could be doubled in size, to 16 groups of four, after the initial qualifying stage, and a new round of 32 introduced after the group stage. More Champions League places for lower-ranked clubs would also strengthen domestic leagues."

Posted by "righteous 1", March 16

"I am resentful towards Platini's proposal to allow only three teams from Spain, Italy and England. Everyone knows that in European club football, these are the three most popular and best domestic leagues and produce either the winners or the finalists in the Champions League. The balance of power cannot be shifted, and as an outsider who lives far away from Europe, I would not like any so-called lesser team coming from an east European nation and playing some third-rate football instead of a big team exhibiting some out-of-the-world football."

Posted by "subhankar mondal", March 17

"All the European competitions were devalued when they allowed non-champions into the European Cup. It immediately relegated the UEFA Cup to a 'mid-table' competition, where previously it had been for runners-up, and made a nonsense of the concept of the European Cup. I agree with the direction Platini is going. The likelihood of his succeeding is sadly small."

Posted by "Richie C", March 19

"If Platini's plan goes through I worry that it will strengthen G-14's desire to set up a rival breakaway competition. For them the competition is not about finding the best club team in Europe, it's about ensuring a regular income stream. If they can't do this within UEFA, they'll look for ways to do it on their own."

Posted by "richards", March 19

Post your comments at worldsoccer.com/forums
worldsoccer.com

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

Big bash...Italy parade the World Cup in Rome

● Last July, a piece of the **World Cup trophy** chipped off in the melee as fans greeted the Italy players on their triumphant return from Germany. Fortunately, the trophy's creator, Milanese sculptor Silvio Gazzaniga, is on hand to repair the damage.

● Eight of the players in UEFA's original squad of 22 for the **Manchester United v Europe XI** match at Old Trafford failed to turn up.

● West Ham defender **Anton Ferdinand** was pulled over when driving by armed police and forced to kneel on the ground with his hands in the air. The car, borrowed from team-mate Carlton Cole, who had it on lease from a hire firm, was linked to a robbery. Neither player had any knowledge of this, and the police allowed Ferdinand to proceed.

● A movie based on the life of **Diego Maradona** has gone on general release in Italy. *La Mano di Dio* (Hand of God) will also be shown at the Cannes film festival.

● Non-league **AFC Wimbledon** had their points deduction for fielding an ineligible player cut from 18 to three after the intervention of Tony Blair. The punishment had been imposed after the Ryman League club failed to gain international clearance to field midfielder Jermaine Darlington, whom they signed from Cardiff City last summer. Under English FA and Ryman League rules, clearance should have been sought from the Welsh FA, even though Cardiff play in the English Football League. The prime minister said: "It's a daft rule and someone should change it."

● According to reports in Bolivia, Chelsea are interested in signing 14-year-old Blooming midfielder **Diego Suarez**, the youngest player to appear in the Libertadores Cup. Suarez, who is currently paid £25 a month, said: "I hope to earn more if I play for Chelsea."

Possible pay rise...Diego Suarez

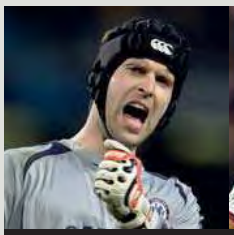
ESM Team of the Month

European Sports Magazines

MARCH

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Magazines group vote for their first XI from Europe's top leagues. The players with most votes make the overall team of the month.



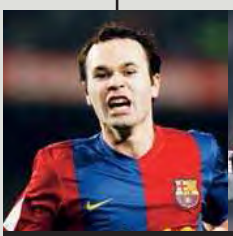
Petr Cech
(Chelsea, 4 votes)
Has made a remarkable recovery since fracturing his skull last autumn. No sign of post-accident trauma here, just peerless reflexes, authority and concentration.

Daniel Alves
(Sevilla, 7 votes)
Week in, week out, the Brazilian right-back-cum-winger excels. It's easy to see why so many top clubs are ready to break the bank to bring him on board.

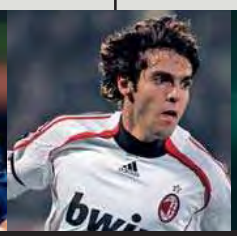
Alex
(PSV, 2 votes)
The centre-back more than made up for his own goal away to Arsenal in the Champions League, leaping to head a late equaliser to put PSV into the quarter-finals.

Lucio
(Bayern Munich, 4 votes)
Has a painful toe injury but you would never guess that from his dynamic and resilient defensive displays. Also scored the winner against Real Madrid.

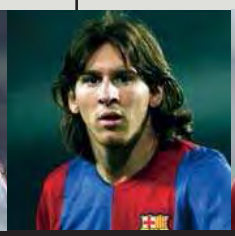
Cristiano Ronaldo
(Manchester Utd, 8 votes)
Gave a masterclass of attacking brilliance in a 4-1 thumping of Bolton. Also decisive in United's FA Cup quarter-final win over Middlesbrough.



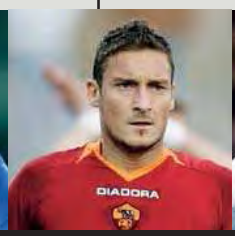
Andres Iniesta
(Barcelona, 3 votes)
Particularly impressive in Barca's 4-0 romp at Recreativo. His fine support play and distribution have been vital as the team look to bounce back from their Champions League exit.



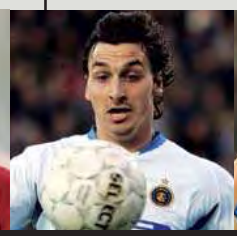
Kaka
(Milan, 5 votes)
Seemed to be playing Celtic on his own in the Champions League tie at San Siro. Scored a memorable winner after a surging run from deep, hit the woodwork and generally ran the show.



Lionel Messi
(Barcelona, 6 votes)
The Argentinian whizzkid almost single-handedly kept crisis from the Barca door with an extraordinary hat-trick in the 3-3 draw at home to Real Madrid, each of the goals an equaliser.



Francesco Totti
(Roma, 5 votes)
On his own up front, the Roma captain was quite outstanding as his side won 2-0 away to favourites Lyon. Scored with a fine header and led the line with guile and confidence.



Zlatan Ibrahimovic
(Internazionale, 5 votes)
Has come of age this season, stripping down his game to the essentials and becoming more disciplined both in his tactical approach and on-pitch conduct.

Luca Toni
(Fiorentina, 4 votes)
On target with two fizzing headers as Italy got their Euro 2008 qualification campaign back on track with a 2-0 win over Scotland in Bari. A potent mix of muscle, touch and finishing ability.

HOW THEY VOTED

A Bola (Portugal)
Cech (Chelsea)
Daniel Alves (Sevilla)
Ricardo Carvalho (Chelsea)
O'Shea (Man Utd)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Man Utd)
Lampard (Chelsea)
Ronaldinho (Barcelona)
Gerrard (Liverpool)
Rooney (Man Utd)
Shevchenko (Chelsea)
Ibrahimovic (Internazionale)

Don Balon (Spain)
Palop (Sevilla)
Daniel Alves (Sevilla)
Lucio (Bayern Munich)
Agger (Liverpool)
Quaresma (Porto)
Messi (Barcelona)
Kaka (Milan)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Man Utd)
Ibrahimovic (Internazionale)
Huntelaar (Ajax)
Totti (Roma)

Fanatik (Turkey)
Cech (Chelsea)
Juan (Bayer Leverkusen)
Maicon (Internazionale)
Ayala (Valencia)
Lucio (Bayern Munich)
Xabi Alonso (Liverpool)
Jesus Navas (Sevilla)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Man Utd)
Messi (Barcelona)
Totti (Roma)
Rocchi (Lazio)

Foot (Belgium)
Palop (Sevilla)
Daniel Alves (Sevilla)
Ferdinand (Man Utd)
Carragher (Liverpool)
Lampard (Chelsea)
Perrotta (Roma)
Messi (Barcelona)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Man Utd)
Quaresma (Porto)
Totti (Roma)
Kuranyi (Schalke)

Gazzetta dello Sport (Italy)
Cech (Chelsea)
Zambrotta (Barcelona)
Juan (Bayer Leverkusen)
Pepe (Porto)
Lahm (Bayern Munich)
Daniel Alves (Sevilla)
Silva (Valencia)
Kaka (Milan)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Man Utd)
Toni (Fiorentina)
Ibrahimovic (Internazionale)

Kicker (Germany)
Adler (Bayer Leverkusen)
Daniel Alves (Sevilla)
Lucio (Bayern Munich)
Alex (PSV)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Man Utd)
Iniesta (Barcelona)
Kaka (Milan)
Ronaldinho (Barcelona)
Kuranyi (Schalke)
Toni (Fiorentina)
Totti (Roma)

Sport-Express (Russia)
Palop (Sevilla)
Materazzi (Internazionale)
Terry (Chelsea)
Riise (Liverpool)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Man Utd)
Iniesta (Barcelona)
Messi (Barcelona)
Totti (Roma)
Kerzhakov (Sevilla)
Ibrahimovic (Internazionale)
Toni (Fiorentina)

Voetbal International (Holland)
Cech (Chelsea)
Miguel (Valencia)
Lucio (Bayern Munich)
Daniel Alves (Sevilla)
Diarra (Chelsea)
Iniesta (Barcelona)
Messi (Barcelona)
Kaka (Milan)
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Daniel Alves (Sevilla)
Carragher (Liverpool)
Alex (PSV)
Mexes (Roma)
Mancini (Roma)
De Zeeuw (AZ)
Kaka (Milan)
Messi (Barcelona)
Ibrahimovic (Internazionale)
Huntelaar (Ajax)

NUMBERS GAME

Figuring out the footballing world

£407,000
The amount a judge ordered Benfica to pay rivals Porto in compensation for Hungarian striker Miklos Feher, who died in 2004 after suffering a heart attack during a match and whose sporting rights were part-owned by Porto.

£0
The cost of assembling the Kilmarnock squad, managed by Jim Jefferies, that lost to Hibernian in the Scottish League Cup Final.

£800m
The predicted final cost of building the new Wembley stadium.

Hefty price...the new Wembley

16
months between Alvaro Recoba's last appearance for Uruguay and his call-up for the recent friendly against South Korea.

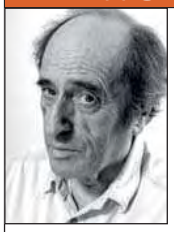
Long wait...Recoba

55,700
The attendance at the first game to be played at the new Wembley.

£2.5m
The potential cost to the English FA of paying off head coach Steve McClaren.

£41,900
The UEFA fine imposed on Lille because of the crowd disturbances and player misbehaviour during the home Champions League clash with Manchester United.

1
Argentina's position in the latest FIFA world rankings, the first time they have held top spot.



Brian Glanville

...on FIFA's despicable failure to properly punish Jack Warner and son...McClaren's mistake over Gareth Barry...the careers of the late Jock Dodds and John Ritchie...and the FA's selective punishment regime

AS THE SICILIANS have it, one hand washes the other. So it goes on, inevitably, secretively and despicably, at FIFA. Not least when it comes to the devious machinations of the ineffable Jack Warner, still, alas, a FIFA vice-president, though perhaps, on reflection, the designation is rather appropriate.

Warner and his various misdeeds have been well and truly exposed by that excellent investigator Andrew Jennings in his recent book *Foul!*. Not that it ever makes much difference. When Jennings' path crosses that of the egregious Warner, he is usually insulted.

The latest shocking scandal shows FIFA at its worst, and concerns the ticket scam of the last World Cup, whereby Daryan Warner, son of Honest Jack and the evident fall guy, was found guilty of wheeling and dealing through Simpaul Travel, the company established in Trinidad by father Jack, in some 5,400 tickets. In addition, Jack Warner was bang to rights early in 2006 of shifting another 1,700 tickets, rightful property of the Trinidad & Tobago World Cup team, to Simpaul.

Jack accordingly got rid of his shares in Simpaul, but Daryan remained the managing director and dealt in hundreds more tickets to the black market.

Auditors Ernst & Young believed that the Warners stood to profit by around £500,000. This was roughly the size of the fine imposed by FIFA on Daryan in secret. I repeat: in secret.

But why in secret? This surely is the greater scandal. Compounded by the fact that, by last Christmas, only a quarter of the fine had been paid.

You would hope that numerous national bodies, not least our somnolent and benighted FA, would have raised the roof in furious protest, but so far, not a peep. The only explanation for FIFA's astounding and deplorable decision for secrecy is that they wanted to spare the ghastly Jack embarrassment.

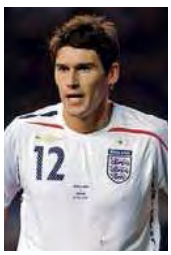
Touched by scandal ...Jack Warner

Omerta is what the Mafia call it, the conspiracy of silence. Meanwhile, Warner senior has secured, unopposed, a new term as president of CONCACAF, another controversial organisation.

Joao Havelange, the Teflon president of FIFA, did what he liked for 28 deplorable years. Sepp Blatter has followed in his hoof marks.

And for all the beguiling charm of Michel Platini, new president of UEFA, it is hardly reassuring that he is so enthusiastically supported by Blatter, even to the extent of the FIFA president ignoring protocol and coming out in Platini's favour before the UEFA presidential election, to the displeasure of incumbent Lennart Johansson, whom Blatter somehow, mysteriously, managed to defeat in the FIFA presidential election in 1998. So it goes on. Who can stop it?

BEFORE England's trip to Israel, hapless manager Steve McClaren was talking the game up as if it were Dunkirk. If this were so, he could logically blame himself for his tactical ineptitude and mistaken selections in previous Euro 2008 qualifying games against Macedonia and Croatia. That 3-5-2 in Croatia sticks indelibly in the mind.



Notable omission ...Gareth Barry

And when the squad for Tel Aviv was announced, it seemed absurd that Gareth Barry was initially not in it. This, despite the fact that the first and second-choice left-backs were not available: Ashley Cole suspended, Wayne Bridge injured.

Barry, a natural left-footer, has been enjoying another outstanding season at Aston Villa, used variously in left midfield – his favoured role – or at left-back and even in central midfield, to the delight of his manager, Martin O'Neill.

McClaren, in his folly, preferred Phil Neville, a right-footed player seldom better than mediocre at international level.

The fatuous defence offered for McClaren, that he simply hasn't got the players England need, can be laughed out of court. Even if this were true, it is in such circumstances that a coach should demonstrate his abilities; making, if you like, a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Just as that wily old German Otto Rehhagel did so conspicuously at Euro 2004, when his Greece team of anonymities surged past the French and Portuguese to win the title.

IN LATE February, alas, came the deaths of two once-prolific centre-forwards, big, strong men in the old British tradition. Ephraim "Jock" Dodds was a venerable 90; John Ritchie only 65.

Dodds' career spanned the Second World War. Best known to my generation of schoolboys as the dreadnought centre-forward who scored over 100 league goals in two wartime seasons with Blackpool, he was actually a teenage star with Sheffield United. Dodds led their attack against Arsenal in the 1936 FA Cup Final, and hit a post in the first half. The then mighty Gunners ultimately beat their second division opponents with a very late goal by Ted Drake, another barnstorming centre-forward.

At Blackpool, Dodds excelled in a forward line of Stanley Matthews (guesting from Stoke), Ronnie Dix (Spurs), Bob Finan, the one true Blackpool player, and Eddie Burbanks, Sunderland's quick outside-left.

Called up by Scotland in April 1942 to play a previously all-conquering England team at Hampden Park, he responded with a hat trick, enabling his side to achieve a rare victory, 5-4. Yet Dodds got only one more game, early the following season, when the Scots forged a 0-0 draw at Wembley.

Everton were his last major club, though he had a final spell in 1949 with Lincoln City, by which time he weighed over 14 stone. The following year Dodds emerged, both from retirement and his Blackpool rock factory, to admit he had been a middle man in sending British players to Bogota, Colombia, a country that was then out of FIFA and thus able to lure players without transfer fees.

Ritchie's halcyon days were spent with Stoke, though there was a brief interlude with Sheffield Wednesday. Tony Waddington, that shrewd assembler of veteran stars, who had originally signed him sight-unseen from Kettering Town, Ritchie's hometown club, then bought him back for a mere £25,000.

It was easy and quite wrong to dismiss Ritchie as merely a striker who was strong in the air. He could do clever and incisive things on the ground as well, seldom more so than when Stoke and their sprightly veterans won the club's solitary major honour, beating Chelsea, the favourites, at Wembley in the League Cup Final of 1972. Alas, Ritchie's career was doomed to be cut short when he shattered a leg at Ipswich in a tackle with Kevin Beattie. He did once play and score for a Football League XI, but was never capped by England.

WHEN it comes to imposing discipline, you might well say that the FA is selective. It was proper enough to call Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger up before the beak for declaring that the linesman who had "fingered" his forward, Emmanuel Adebayor, in that torrid League Cup Final was a liar – he was nothing of the sort.

But no sanction would be imposed on the ever-voluble and volatile Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho for calling referee Mike Riley, albeit in Portuguese, a "son of a whore" after that dramatic FA Cup tie against Tottenham. Airily, Mourinho did his best to make light of the insult, saying that he used it all the time, which leads one to believe that he must lead something of a charmed life. In Portuguese, Italian or Spanish, it is a serious and highly provocative insult. ●

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QUOTES & NOTES

Who said what and why

Blame game...under-fire Domenech with Henry

"I feel Henry was badly managed by the French team after the World Cup."
Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger blames France coach Raymond Domenech for his forward's injury-ravaged season.

"Mr Wenger is starting to seriously tire me. His explanation for Henry's injury is ridiculous. After every game for us, he played for Arsenal three days later."
Domenech responds.

"As far as I know, corpses don't speak."
A furious Diego Maradona calls a Buenos Aires radio station to deny reports that he had been killed in a car crash.

Alive...Maradona

"I hope Real Madrid win the League but only for the sake of my old team-mates, not for the coach, who doesn't deserve it."
Ronaldo, who joined Milan in January, hits back at Fabio Capello.

"I let my frustrations get the better of me. I'm very sorry."
Bayern Munich keeper Oliver Kahn is contrite after receiving a one-match Champions League ban for aggressively confronting a dope-test doctor following a game against Real Madrid.

"I didn't sleep a wink."
Madrid's Roberto Carlos comments the day after gifting Bayern a goal after 10 seconds.

"I've a debt to Barca. If people offer you their trust, you cannot then turn your back on them."
Coach Frank Rijkaard vows to carry on at Camp Nou amid reports he is on borrowed time.

"I've already moved house 30 times. Now I want to stay home in Buenos Aires."
Former Boca Juniors and Atletico Madrid boss Carlos Bianchi quits coaching to set up a talent agency.

"I am 36 in September and I have done my bit."
Henrik Larsson denies that he is to make another comeback for Sweden.

"Between Roma and my country I choose Roma, of that there is no doubt."
Francesco Totti explains his decision to take a break from the Italy set-up.

Rome boy...Totti

PLAYER SALARIES

Who takes home what

£1.12m

UNITED STATES

The annual salary cap for each Major League Soccer club. In a 20-man squad, this gives an average wage of £56,000, though some players receive as little as £20,000. However, each club is now allowed one "designated player", whose salary is not drawn from the budget. David Beckham is Los Angeles Galaxy's DP. Part of his estimated income of £500,000 a week is paid by the League, but most of it comes from sponsors.

£676,000

ENGLAND

The average annual salary of a Premier League footballer, according to a 2006 survey by the Professional Footballers' Association. Typically, that figure rises by between 60 and 100 per cent when performance-related bonuses are taken into account. Chelsea's Andrii Shevchenko and Michael Ballack are believed to be the biggest earners, each collecting £6.29million per year (£121,000 a week).

£30,000

BRAZIL

The monthly wage of Ze Roberto at Santos, making him the highest-paid player in the national championship. The average is much lower.

£440m

SPAIN

The total wage bill for top division clubs in the 2004-05 season. Not surprisingly, Barcelona and Real Madrid players tend to be the best-paid. Barca's Ronaldinho (pictured) is the highest earner on £5.7million a year; Real Madrid's biggest earners are David Beckham (£5m) and Roberto Carlos (£4m).

£1.23m

ARGENTINA

The amount Juan Roman Riquelme will reportedly receive for his four-month stint at Boca Juniors on loan from Villarreal. The figure puts Riquelme way ahead of most of his team-mates.

£342,000

FRANCE

The average annual salary in the top division. Lyon midfielder Juninho Pernambucano is the highest earner, on £1.97million. French clubs complain that relatively high tax rates make it hard for them to attract foreign players whereas Monaco can entice players because of the principality's zero-tax status.

£370,000

GERMANY

The average annual salary of a Bundesliga player. The top earner is Bayern Munich keeper Oliver Kahn on £3.6million, or £70,000 a week. In total, Bundesliga clubs were estimated to have spent £302m on wages in the 2005-06 season. Bayern were the biggest spenders, splashing out £40.8m.

£73,000

ITALY

The weekly wage of Roma forward Francesco Totti, the highest-paid player in the country. Player wages remain relatively buoyant despite calcio's recent financial problems, though former international forward Christian Vieri agreed to join Atalanta on a basic £1,025 per month last summer. However, he is due to earn an extra £68,000 for every goal he scores.

£650,000

JAPAN

The estimated annual salary of the J.League's biggest earners, Brazilians Washington (Urawa Reds) and Magno Alves (Gamba Osaka, pictured). The typical salary for a top division regular ranges from £65,000 to £175,000.

£163,000

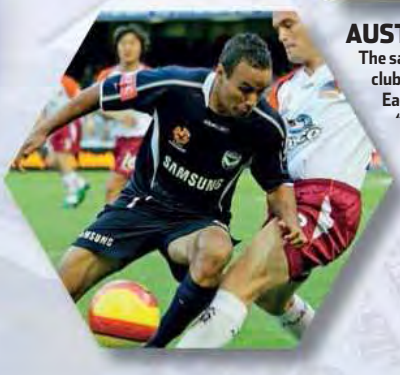
UKRAINE

The monthly salary of the top division's biggest earners, all Brazilians – Matuzalem, Elano and Jadson (Shakhtar Donetsk) and Diogo Rincon, pictured, and Kleber (Kyiv Dynamo). The average monthly wage is only £1,633.

£657,000

AUSTRALIA

The salary cap for each A-League club in the 2006-07 season. Each club can also sign two "marquee players", whose salaries are not drawn from the capped budget.



joma
STEVE

HEADLINERS

People in the news...on and off the pitch

Frederic Kanoute
Ex-Tottenham striker firing on all cylinders for Sevilla

SPAIN

WHEN TOTTENHAM travelled to face Sevilla in the UEFA Cup at Easter they could have been forgiven for not recognising former striker Frederic Kanoute. After all, he barely recognises himself these days.

When he arrived at Sevilla at the start of last season, Kanoute insisted: "I'm not the kind of striker who scores goals," and Spurs fans would have agreed. He could be wonderful on the ball, he held it up superbly and brought team-mates into the game. But goals? Hardly.

Kanoute had never scored more than 11 in a league season during spells at Lyon, West Ham and Spurs, and hit only six league goals in 32 games in his first season at the Sanchez Pizjuan. Yes, he was vital to the team, but not because of his goals. One Spanish guidebook's pen picture summed him up: "Big, and misses lots of chances, but very important."

Then something changed, dramatically. Kanoute started this term hitting the net and didn't stop.

One Spanish newspaper described him as "the accidental goalscorer", but it was no fluke. Sevilla had given Kanoute two wingers, who supplied pass after pass, playing to his strengths. The club had yet again taken a player to a higher level, by giving him the right preparation and the right tactical balance. "Kanoute is the perfect example of what we are doing here," said coach Juande Ramos. "He has been extraordinary."

He certainly has. With 11 matches remaining, Kanoute was Spain's top scorer with 19 goals and on course for the ESM Golden Shoe award for Europe's top scorer. He has played virtually every minute, even through injury, so fundamental has he become to Sevilla's success. The greatest fear of the fans going into the final weeks of the season is that a pelvic injury, which has kept him out of numerous training sessions, might keep him out of matches. Although Ramos has rested him whenever possible he has not dared leave him out too often.

Kanoute still has that languid, cool, almost gentle style he showed in England but now is effective with it. "He scores goals with an incredible insouciance," wrote one columnist. "Imagine how good he would be if he got stung by a wasp."

The Mali striker is "the best player in the League – and certainly the biggest surprise", according to former Spain star Julio Salinas. He can say that again. "Of course people are surprised at how many goals I have scored," Kanoute says. "I'm pretty surprised myself."

Sid Lowe

Mirko Slomka
Unheralded coach of leaders Schalke

GERMANY

GERMAN FOOTBALL'S Polish connections go back a long way. Schalke's rise to glory in the 1930s owed much to the sons of Polish mining families, brought to the Ruhr by the coal pits. Now, a Polish link is paying off as the club are on course for their first league title since pre-Bundesliga days.

Coach Mirko Slomka, born in Hildesheim to immigrants, has guided the Gelsenkirchen club to the top of the table and has just been rewarded by sports director Andreas Muller with a contract extension until the summer of 2009.

The 39-year-old is as surprised as anyone at his sudden rise to fame. Slomka never played professionally and took his coaching badges while simultaneously training to be a ski instructor. He edged his way into professional football as a youth coach at yo-yo club Hannover, where he helped bring on Gerald Asamoah, Sebastian Kehl, Per Mertesacker and Fabian Ernst.

Slomka went on to become head coach at lower division Tennis Borussia Berlin and arrived at Schalke in October 2004, as assistant to Ralf Rangnick.

When Rangnick was sacked in December 2005, Slomka thought he was about to be fired too when summoned to a meeting with the board. Instead, he was handed the coaching reins, on a caretaker basis at first, and proceeded to guide Schalke to fourth place in the Bundesliga last season and into the UEFA Cup semi-finals.

Upbeat...Slomka and Schalke's Krstajic

This season, it has not been all plain sailing, despite the current league position. Indeed, Slomka looked under threat in the autumn after Schalke lost 3-2 on aggregate to Nancy in the first round of the UEFA Cup, exited the German Cup to second division Koln and lost 3-0 at Stuttgart in the League.

He said: "That defeat by Nancy was a huge disappointment. We had expected much more. It was also tough because I know I have been under close scrutiny because I am not an experienced coach with a long track record of trophies."

Impatient fans staged a novel silent protest – lasting 19 minutes four seconds (1904 is the year of the club's creation) – at the home game against Bayern Munich that followed the Stuttgart defeat. But Schalke scored twice in those first 20 minutes and, although Bayern fought back for a 2-2 draw, confidence had been restored, the team won their next four league games and Slomka was safe.

The coach remains confident that his squad possess the talent to finish the job, despite a damaging suspension for Brazilian playmaker Lincoln. But he stresses: "We cannot relax. To achieve what we want, everything needs to go our way."

Keir Radnedge

Daryan & Jack Warner
FIFA fine for son of controversial vice-president

TRINIDAD

New term...Jack Warner

Daryan Warner, son of FIFA's Trinidadian vice-president Jack Warner, has been fined £500,000 by the world governing body for his part in last year's World Cup ticket scandal.

FIFA banned Simpaul, the Warner family travel firm, from dealing in tickets after it was revealed they stood to make nearly £500,000. As a result, Jack Warner disposed of his shares in the company but Daryan stayed as managing director.

Last December, FIFA president Sepp Blatter expressed his "disapproval" at the conduct of Jack Warner, one of his closest supporters, but stopped short of disciplining him. He also made no mention in public of the fine handed out to Daryan.

Meanwhile, Warner senior is in line for a fifth term as president of CONCACAF. Although the decision will not formally be announced until congress on May 12, he was the only candidate to declare by the deadline.

Roberto Carlos
Last of the foreign galacticos to announce Real Madrid departure

SPAIN

Roberto Carlos has confirmed that he will leave Real Madrid when his contract expires this June. Three of the four other foreign galacticos of the Florentino Perez era have already left – Luis Figo, Zinedine Zidane and Ronaldo – and David Beckham announced some weeks ago he will leave for Major League Soccer in the summer.

"My time here has ended," said the veteran Brazil defender. "After three years without winning anything I had to take a decision. I don't know whether I will continue in Europe or maybe I need to be back in Brazil close to my family.

"My departure will help the youngsters like Marcelo and Miguel Torres. They are the future and have to be given a chance to develop. I have to look for motivation in another team, another country."

Set to leave...Roberto Carlos

Honest, that's a goal...Romario

Romario
Veteran goal-getter has a problem with numbers

BRAZIL

Romario undermined his claim to be on the verge of a 1,000th career goal by conceding that 71 of his tally were scored before he turned professional. The 41-year-old made his admission after hitting what he claimed was his 999th goal, for Vasco da Gama against arch-rivals Flamengo.

On an initial list, the 1994 World Cup winner had apparently also included goals scored in testimonial games and club friendlies, although he later deleted some of these. Brazilian magazine *Placar* has been doing its own digging into the issue and discovered numerous "unusual goals" on Romario's initial list, including nine for PSV Eindhoven in matches that are not in the club's records.

Romario also claimed to have scored twice for PSV against Barcelona in a 1992 friendly. But the clubs say they never played the match in question.

Emmanuel Adebayor

Striker suspended as bonus row rumbles on

TOGO

Threat...Adebayor

The Togolese federation has suspended striker Emmanuel Adebayor after he threatened to boycott the national team in an ongoing row about World Cup appearance money.

Adebayor, who along with Mohamed Kader Cougbadja and Nibombe Dare claim they are owed £30,000 on top of the £50,000 they have already received, said he would miss the African Nations Cup game against Sierra Leone in protest. Although the Arsenal star backed down, scoring twice in a 3-1 win, his threat led the federation to act. Cougbadja and Dare have also been banned.

Giampaolo Pazzini

Under-21 forward sets rapid Wembley record

ITALY

Italian Under-21 striker Giampaolo Pazzini scored the fastest goal in Wembley history when hitting the first goal at the rebuilt arena after just 28 seconds against England's Under-21s. The Fiorentina youngster went on to grab a hat-trick in the 3-3 draw. Bryan Robson had set the record at 38 seconds in 1989 when scoring for England against Yugoslavia.

Pazzini, formerly with Atalanta, was Italy's young player of the year in 2005.

Ground-breaking...Pazzini

MOVERS & SHAKERS

News of the politicians and power-brokers

Bowing out...Vanden Stock, seen honouring retiring Anderlecht player Par Zetterberg last season

Vanden Stock falls

● **ROGER VANDEN STOCK** has quit as deputy chairman of the Belgian federation, citing "personal reasons" and pressure of work with Anderlecht – where, like his father Constant before him, he is president. Vanden Stock's departure from the federation was hardly a surprise. His original clear ambition was to become president but that was scuppered by other league clubs who felt he would have a conflict of interests.

"That was really hard to accept," Vanden Stock said, "because I had been working for two years on a strategic plan to reform the federation root and branch. From now on my family comes first, closely followed by Anderlecht."

● UEFA president Michel Platini is not the first former player to lead a confederation. Indeed, Tahiti's **REYNALD TEMARII**, once of Nantes, is now into his second term as president of Oceania. However, his playing career was somewhat less memorable than his European counterpart. Temarii scored one goal in six games for Nantes' reserves in the French third division in 1988-89.

● **TOMMASO GHIRARDI**, 31, has become one of the youngest owners of a Serie A club after buying Parma at auction for £20million. He quickly made his mark, firing coach Stefani Pioli and bringing in Claudio Ranieri. Ghirardi previously owned fourth division Carpenedolo.

Keir Radnedge

Parma purchase...Ghirardi

RUMOURS

Snoops and scoops from the global sports press

Abidal wanted in Barcelona and Milan

WITH Barcelona's defence showing signs of vulnerability, Catalan daily *Sport* is tipping Deportivo La Coruna's Portuguese centre-back JORGE ANDRADE and Lyon and France left-back ERIC ABIDAL to arrive at Camp Nou this summer.

Accused...De Rossi

According to *France Football,* Abidal, who is under contract with Lyon until 2009, is also wanted by Milan, who have put agent Oscar Damiani on the case. However, Milan may be disappointed. Abidal's representative told *Gazzetta dello Sport* that his client would never go to Serie A after allegedly being racially abused by Roma's DANIELE DE ROSSI during a recent Champions League tie.

> Catalan daily *Sport* is tipping Jorge Andrade and Eric Abidal to arrive at Camp Nou to bolster Barcelona's vulnerable defence

Italy's *Tuttosport* takes another tack. It has Barca recruiting Sevilla's Brazilian full-back DANIEL ALVES and De Rossi. The Turin-based paper says Barca are prepared to pay up to £18million for the latter and could even throw in Thiago Motta, Edmilson and Juliano Belletti for good measure.

Tuttosport also quoted Barca full-back GIANLUCA ZAMBROTTA as saying that he would leave only for Milan.

Corriere dello Sport claimed that Internazionale technical director Marco Branca had spoken with the father of LIONEL MESSI about his son's plans. The paper also flagged up the club's apparent interest in Arsenal midfielders CESC FABREGAS and TOMAS ROSICKY and forwards ANTONIO CASSANO (Real Madrid), DAVID TREZEGUET (Juventus) and DAVID VILLA (Valencia).

Corriere spoke to 23 agents about what they expected from the summer market. Three prominent themes emerged: EMERSON to quit Real Madrid for Milan; SAMUEL ETO'O to join Juventus from Barca; and Inter to lure Fiorentina striker LUCA TONI.

Juve target?...Lampard

German magazine *Kicker* thinks Toni could be bound for Bayern Munich, saying the club's superscout, Paul Breitner, has been told to keep tabs on him.

Inter and Manchester United are going to do battle for Sampdoria front-man FABIO QUAGLIARELLA, according to *Gazzetta dello Sport,* which also gives credence to rumours that Juventus want Chelsea's FRANK LAMPARD.

> *Kicker* believes Luca Toni could be bound for Bayern Munich, with club scout Paul Breitner having been told to keep tabs on him

Madrid paper *AS* has gone big on KAKA moving to Real Madrid from Milan. It predicts German Bernd Schuster will be the next boss at the Bernabeu and that he wants to make the Brazilian the cornerstone of his team. Real will offer Milan £21.5m plus Fabio Cannavaro and Mahamadou Diarra.

France Football is pushing the line that CARLOS TEVEZ could soon be on his way from West Ham to Marseille and it believes Lyon midfielder FLORENT MALOUDA may join Arsenal or Chelsea.

GOOD MONTH FOR...

Bernd Schuster

Contender...Schuster

The German coach of Getafe has emerged as a leading contender to take over at Real Madrid this summer.

Nicolas Anelka

The Bolton striker capped his return to the French national side with a brilliant solo goal against Lithuania in the Euro 2008 qualifiers.

Ivan Klasnic

Werder Bremen's Croatian striker was reported to have successfully undergone a second kidney transplant after the failure of the first operation in January.

BAD MONTH FOR...

Fred

Row...Fred and Chivu

Lyon's Brazilian striker was banned for three European games for elbowing Roma's Cristian Chivu in the Champions League second round second leg after UEFA studied TV pictures.

David Navarro

FIFA extended the Valencia defender's ban – six months, reduced from seven on appeal – to apply to all competitions. UEFA had suspended Navarro from European competition for his part in the mass brawl with Inter players after a Champions League tie.

Nicholas Caglioni

The Messina keeper faces a lengthy ban after testing positive for cocaine following his side's Serie A game against Catania in February.

BLATTERWATCH Keeping tabs on the FIFA president

Ukraine comments spark controversy

Whipping up a storm...Blatter

SEPP BLATTER caused a storm ahead of the vote on Euro 2012 hosting when, on a visit to Ukraine, he backed the joint Poland-Ukraine bid. "I hope that the championship will be held here," he said. "I know both these countries have done a lot to merit staging the championship. But of course, it's up to the UEFA executive committee to make a decision."

Back in Switzerland, he turned his attention to addressing the game's problems. "We have now come to a crossroads. Our football is ill and we must find medicine," he said after an executive committee meeting.

Blatter added that while successive FIFA congresses had examined the problems and sought to raise awareness, "now we need to act".

On the issue of deteriorating discipline among players, Blatter suggested that coaches could also be punished. "Coaches are also responsible for the behaviour of their team," he said. "Violence is inside the stadiums, and very well-paid players are coming to blows, like at Cardiff [English League Cup Final] or Valencia [v Inter in the Champions League].

"If players are not educated and coaches don't impose a minimum of discipline on them, where are we heading?"

> "I hope the [Euro 2012] championship will be held in Ukraine...but of course, it's up to UEFA"

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Down on his luck...Ruud Van Nistelrooy wishes the ground would swallow him up after missing an easy chance for Real Madrid in the 3-3 draw with Barcelona

Consistently inconsistent

SID LOWE
in Madrid

THERE ARE THREE teams in Germany, two in England and just one in Italy and France. But in Spain there are four, or maybe even six, clubs still in with a chance of being crowned league champions this season.

With 11 games remaining, 10 points separated Barcelona, Sevilla, Real Madrid, Valencia, Zaragoza and Atletico Madrid. The first two were level on 53 points, with Real Madrid third, five points behind, and Valencia another point back.

It is quite a contrast to the previous two championships, both won by Barcelona. They were 10 points ahead at the same stage last year and six clear in 2005.

But while this season may look competitive and exciting on paper, the reality is that there has been little real movement, little fluctuation and little excitement. Few teams can claim to have had purple patches; this campaign has been a consistent shade of grey.

With the exception of Valencia, who have reclaimed a place at the top table they should never have relinquished, the top six has been the same all season.

In truth, the tightness of La Liga owes more to shared mediocrity than mutual brilliance. Former Real Madrid coach Vicente Del Bosque was speaking for many when he

This championship will go down as the one no one wanted to win

declared bluntly: "The quality of the League has been poor this season."

The big teams have utterly lacked consistency, not because their opponents have been stronger but because they themselves have underperformed.

Valencia and Barcelona have been hit by injuries to key players, Real Madrid have been simply awful; the very fact that they can still win the title underlines the drop in quality. As ex-Real player Martin Vazquez put it: "The thing about Madrid games is that nothing happens...nothing at all."

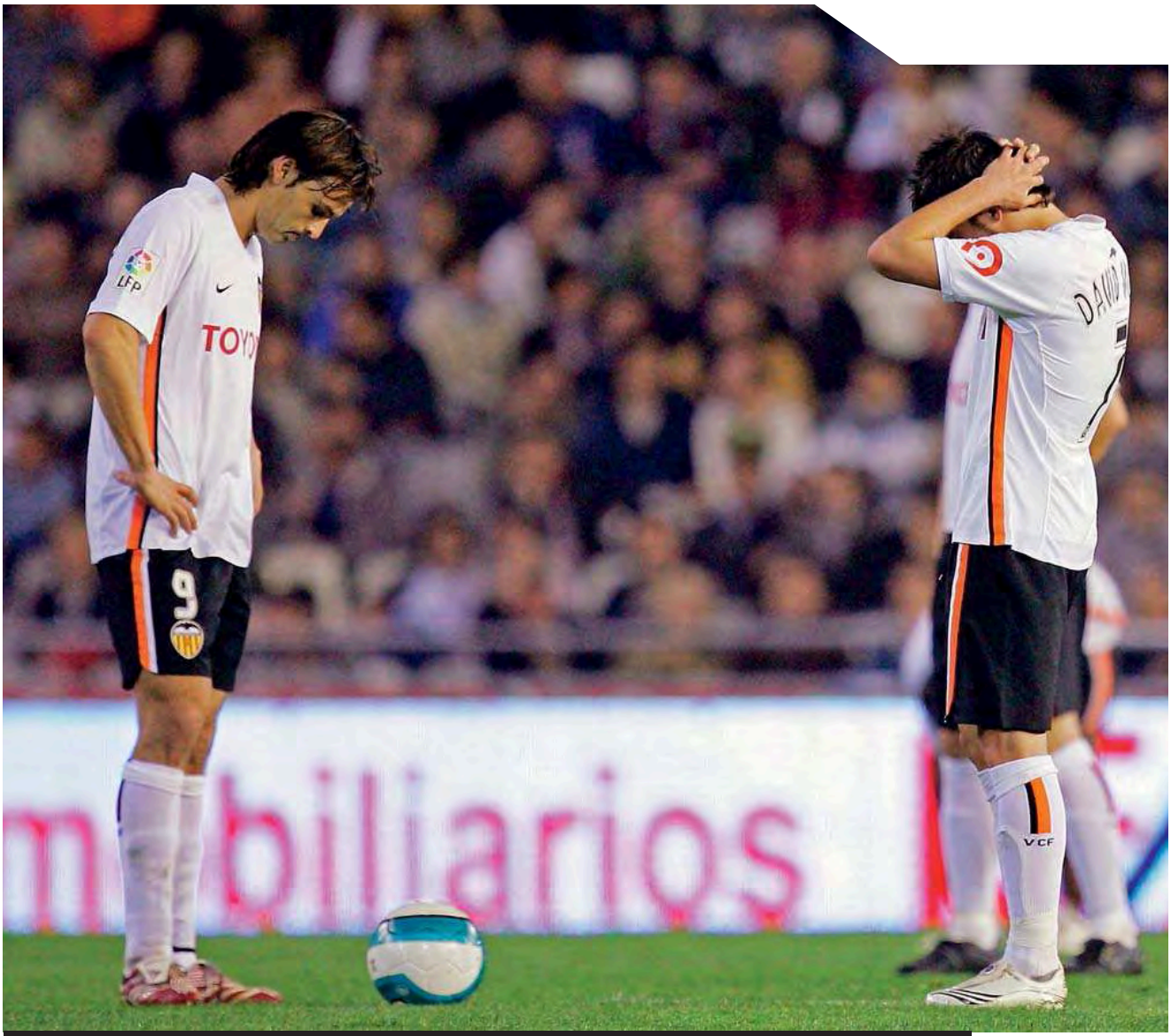
None of the top six had managed to win two successive games in the second half of the season to mid-March. Barcelona had not managed it since November, 16 games before. This championship will go down as the one no one wanted to win.

Only Sevilla, the surprise challengers, could have had any claim to be satisfied with their season, but instead they are rueing dropped points in recent weeks.

"Every time we have had the chance to reinforce our title credentials we have been found wanting," said coach Juande Ramos. It is as if his side are suffering from footballing vertigo. They have held the lead on occasions, but when

"The thing about Real Madrid games is that nothing happens... nothing at all"

Former Madrid player Martin Vazquez



What's going on?...Valencia strikers Fernando Morientes and David Villa can't believe they have just gone two goals down at home to Racing Santander

> **As soon as Valencia were within touching distance of the top two, they went off the boil**

handed the opportunity to open up a gap they have blown it twice – against Mallorca and Zaragoza.

Valencia recovered from their dreadful, injury-hit run with five wins in six games to become real title contenders. But as soon as they were within touching distance of the top two, they went off the boil.

After victory over Atletico, which put them within a single victory of second, they were beaten 3-0 by Getafe. After victory over Barcelona, which again put them within a single win of second, they failed to beat Gimnastic, Osasuna or Racing Santander.

But Barcelona's inconsistency has been the most striking. Against Valencia, they had had the opportunity to maintain a four-point lead, but were out-fought and lost 2-1.

A win away to Sevilla would have sent them five points clear of their opponents, nine ahead of Madrid, and they were 1-0 up when awarded a penalty, with Sevilla down to 10 men. But, having scored five out of five from the spot this season, Ronaldinho had his effort was saved by Andres Palop and Sevilla came back to win 2-1.

Against Madrid in a spectacular game – for once! – at Camp Nou, Barca committed defensive suicide, found themselves down to 10 men for the entire second half after Oleguer had been sent off for a second yellow card, and just scraped a 3-3 draw after the awesome Leo Messi completed his hat-trick in the final minute.

In all, Barca have taken only five points from their six games against Sevilla, Real Madrid and Valencia, underlining the feeling that no side is a worthy league champion. Not yet anyway. But that may be about to change.

New-found belief

The Barca-Real game seemed to bring a new dawn. Madrid declared their new-found belief in winning the League and defeated Gimnastic 2-0, the first time they had scored twice at home in the League since the start of December.

With Samuel Eto'o finally playing 90 minutes, Barca went on to win their first away match since November, hammering Recreativo 4-0. Sevilla overcame the pressure of playing on a Sunday night, knowing that their rivals had won, to defeat Celta Vigo 2-0. Only Valencia remained true to the script, losing an apparently easy home match against Racing Santander, 2-0.

There are 11 weeks to go and the phoney war may, at last, be over. The real battle starts here. ●

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Inter in the clear

Leading man... Zlatan Ibrahimovic, hugged by Nicolas Burdisso, celebrates putting Inter 2-1 up against Milan

Nobody is going to catch the runaway leaders of Serie A

PADDY AGNEW in Rome

FOR A MOMENT in early March, we experienced the illusion that Internazionale might just be in some difficulty. It came with their elimination from the Champions League by Valencia and after the second leg of the second round tie had ended with an unedifying punch-up between the players.

Five days later Inter were due to face Milan in Serie A, in what is always a keenly contested game. If ever there was a moment that Inter, the runaway league leaders, might crack surely it was now, against their city rivals, who had emerged victorious from their Champions League tie against Celtic.

And it seemed that Milan might indeed get the upper hand when Ronaldo, a former Inter player, put them ahead after 40 minutes.

Yet, such is the overwhelming superiority of this Inter side, such is their psychological and technical strength, that they got back into the game and went on to win with a superb second-half display. Julio Cruz and Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored to make it 2-1, and, indeed, Inter could have won more comfortably.

The Serie A championship is over. Inter have it won. By the end of March, they were a staggering 18 points clear of second-placed Roma. They were unbeaten in 28 league games, and had won 24. You have to go back 25 years, to the 1981-82 season, to find the last time they pulled off the derby double on Milan.

Little wonder that Inter boss Massimo Moratti, for just a moment during the derby, lost his habitual aplomb and gave the "l'ombrello" gesture (left forearm over right forearm to say "f*** you" to the world) as he celebrated Inter's win. In contrast, Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi was sporting in defeat, visiting the Inter dressing room after the game to compliment the players.

UEFA bans

In another season, the Valencia defeat would have signalled a sustained Inter decline. This season, it was merely a hiccup on the way to title success. Yet Inter did not escape unscathed, as four players were given bans by UEFA for their part in the brawl – Nicolas Burdisso (six games), Maicon (three) and Ivan Cordoba and Cruz (two). Two Valencia players were banned – David Navarro (six months) and Carlos Marchena (two games) – and the clubs were fined £100,000 each.

Nearly all the bad-tempered farce had been caught on camera, leaving UEFA with little option but to be seen to do something fairly drastic. The incident had come at a delicate moment in Italy, just a month after police inspector Filippo Raciti had been killed during fan riots at the Catania-Palermo derby in Sicily.

Even as Navarro was busy sending a text message of apology to Burdisso, whose nose he had broken – an apology apparently accepted by the Inter player – UEFA president Michel Platini was calling for the formation of a European police force that would deal not only with fan violence but also problems such as illegal betting. He said: "With the help of governments, we need to form a sort of Europol to fight these problems."

All very fine and true, Michel, but in this case the hooligans were out there on the pitch. Were Inter just bad losers? Were Valencia unsporting winners? UEFA appears to have decided that it was a bit of both.

Although the punishments were heavy, they are unlikely to change the unwritten "code" by which players act in such a situation – that everyone sticks together and helps out the player under "attack". Burdisso summed it up next day when saying: "Navarro hit me from behind and that's not the way a real man should behave. However, I'd have to say that I was pleased with the team's reaction. It showed that we are a truly united group of players."

United they may be, but they are also increasingly unpopular. There can be no more certain testimony of the Inter success story this season than that the club, who in recent times were looked on sympathetically by neutral observers because of their record of consistent failure, are now seen as a club to dislike.

In March, one antagonistic fan sent a threatening letter and a spent bullet case to Inter's headquarters. Then there was the public shouting match between Moratti and an outspoken fan of Juventus, whom Inter had replaced as champions last season after the Turin club were stripped of the title as part of their match-fixing punishment. As Moratti arrived for work one morning at the family company, Saras, in downtown Milan, he was met by the usual posse of cameras. As he stood patiently answering the reporters' questions, the fan, Salvatore Cozzolino, started shouting abuse at him from his table outside a bar. Once again, Moratti lost his aplomb as he approached the fan and tried to reason with him. In the end, an exasperated Moratti had to walk off as Cozzolino kept telling him it was time to give back the expropriated title.

That fan may well have been annoyed by Moratti's earlier comment that he had "no nostalgia" for Juventus when asked by an interviewer if he had "missed" them being in Serie A this term. Moratti had added that he hoped the 2007-08 season would work out exactly the same way as this one.

That could well be wishful thinking since it now seems more and more likely that Juventus will be back in the top flight next term and therefore be major rivals to Inter. By the end of March, Juve were three points clear in Serie B and with a game in hand on closest challengers Napoli.

Warlike noises

The Old Lady is already beginning to make warlike noises about next season. A board meeting in March approved a £71million recapitalisation, which ought to make some serious transfer money available. Juventus may lose some key, "unsettled" players such as striker David Trezeguet and midfielder Mauro Camoranesi. But they are reportedly in line to buy Fiorentina striker Luca Toni and Udinese midfielder Sulley Muntari. Bayern Munich midfielder Hasan Salihamidzic has already agreed to join on a free transfer.

So it seems Juventus will be right in there challenging in Serie A with a highly competitive squad. Given the vicissitudes of the past 12 months, the fans could hardly ask for anything better. ●

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"Inter boss Moratti had to walk off as a Juve fan kept telling him it was time to give back the expropriated Serie A title"

Moving on?...Mauro Camoranesi may depart Juventus in the summer, but there should be some top-quality arrivals

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Big day out...ADESG (in black), from the remote western state of Acre, take on Fluminense in the Maracana in the second leg of a Copa Brasil tie

Knickers in a twist

Corinthians were the latest big team to almost come unstuck in the Copa Brasil

DON'T MENTION black knickers to Emerson Leao. The Corinthians coach, hardly known for his sense of humour, was subjected to all sorts of jibes about the garment after his team, the 2005 national champions, were held 1-1 away by virtually unknown Pirambu in the first leg of their first round tie in the Copa Brasil.

Pirambu, from the north-eastern state of Sergipe, were founded only two years ago and are typical of the more unlikely clubs who pop up in the early rounds of Brazil's nationwide knockout competition.

The team are effectively part-timers with a monthly wage bill of just £15,500, and that includes the coaching staff. Among their sponsors is a band known as Calcinha Preta, or black knickers, who provide a quarter of the club's income.

The town of Pirambu has a population of about 9,000, survives mainly from shrimp fishing and tourism, and claims to have the best beaches in the region. It is also proud of its annual carnival, which involves a week of solid *Forro* – the type of dance music Calcinha Preta play, based on an accordion, zabumba and triangle – when the population quadruples.

Needless to say, being drawn against Corinthians was a huge event. Club president Guilherme Zacarias de Melo promised a bonus of nearly £4,000 for the team as a whole if they beat Corinthians at home and another £8,000 if they won the second leg.

"Upsets happen all the time," he said confidently. "We're watching all their games and we hope to surprise them."

But the draw at home was as good as it got for Pirambu who were thumped 3-0 in the return, sparing Leao any more comments about knickers (they don't translate, by the way) and headlines about dancing the *Forro*. The coach was able to go back to his favourite subject – referees – while Corinthians went on to beat a team called Treze (thirteen) in the next round to reach the last 16.

The Copa Brasil is, without doubt, Brazil's most exotic competition. Started in 1988, it is modelled on continental Europe's domestic cup competitions, with home-and-away legs in each round. The cup is routinely known as "the shortest route to the Libertadores Cup" because the eventual winners qualify for the continental competition often after playing only one or two ties against first division sides.

To make life even easier, the teams already in the Libertadores are excluded from the same year's Copa Brasil to cut down on fixture congestion. This effectively rules out the country's top five sides.

However, there is nothing short about some of the trips to the matches in earlier rounds, as each of Brazil's 27 states has at least one representative. The idea is to take the likes of Corinthians to remote corners of the huge country where they would not otherwise go.

Cunningly, the minnows always play the first leg at home, thus avoiding the danger that they will already have suffered a good thrashing and be effectively out of the tournament by the time they play in front of their own fans. Even more cunningly, the away team qualify automatically if they win the first leg by two goals or more. This prevents the minnows getting thrashed at home and then having to travel thousands of kilometres to complete a tie they have no hope of winning.

Fluminense got the short straw this year as they were drawn away to ADESG (Associacao Desportiva Senador Guiomard) in the far-western state of Acre, 4,000km, three time zones and 10 hours' flying time from Rio de Janeiro. The players had to be given typhoid and yellow fever jabs and take malaria pills before travelling.

A 2-1 win for Flu meant the second leg had to be played. This made a nice outing for ADESG's players, none of whom had played at the Maracana before and few of whom had even seen the sea. A trip up Corcovado mountain completed the tour, although spoilsports Fluminense put something of a dampener on proceedings by winning 6-0.

Equator on the halfway line

Other remote outposts include the Roraima state capital Boa Vista, which is closer to Georgetown in Guyana than Rio, and the city of Macapa, where the equator runs along the halfway line at the Zerao (the big zero) stadium.

There tend to be very few major upsets involving the minnows, partly because of the two-leg format, and cricket scores are more common, the record going to Atletico Mineiro who thrashed Caicaras 11-0 in 1991.

However, there have been plenty of cases of second division teams winning the cup, such as Criciuma, led by a certain Luiz Felipe Scolari, in 1991. Santo Andre won it in 2004, and Paulista the following year. Third division Ipatinga got to the semi-finals last year, where they lost to Flamengo, who promptly snapped up their coach, Ney Franco. He led them to the trophy and is still at the club.

The Copa Brasil is certainly more interesting than the state championships, which occupy the first three months of the season before the national championship gets going.

The Paulista (Sao Paulo) championship has expanded to 20 teams, most of whom do little more than clutter up the fixture list. By the time the Brazilian championship's 38-match campaign gets under way in early May, Sao Paulo, Corinthians, Palmeiras and Santos will have already played between 19 and 22 matches in the Paulista.

Rio teams play between 11 and 17 matches in the Carioca championship. This Byzantine competition is split into two phases – the Guanabara Cup and the Rio Cup – and this year's edition offered a perfect example of Brazilian supporters' fickleness. The second leg of the Guanabara Cup Final, between Flamengo and Madureira at Maracana, was watched by a near full house of 80,000 mainly Flamengo fans, who celebrated their team's 4-2 aggregate win as if they had won the Libertadores Cup. But when Flamengo kicked off the Rio Cup against Nova Iguacu four days later at the same stadium, only 4,000 turned up. ●

BRIAN HOMEWOOD in Rio de Janeiro

> "Fluminense got the short straw this year, forced to travel 4,000km through three time zones for the first leg of their first round tie"

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Brazilian bonanza...Gilberto Silva (left) has been one of Arsenal's best players this season, while Julio Baptista appears to have impressed enough to secure a permanent deal at the club

Culture clash

Brazilian players are often complimentary about the Premiership but still sign for clubs in other countries

THE PREMIERSHIP is one of the biggest leagues in the world on many counts, but not in terms of the number of Brazilian players plying their trade. According to the Brazilian FA's transfer documentation, even Canadian and Bahraini clubs have more Brazilians on their books than there are in England. There are currently only five in the Premiership, for instance.

This scarcity is often a topic for discussion whenever I meet English colleagues. Part of the reason for it is the UK's visa rules, which require players to have appeared a set number of times for their national team. But also, many Brazilians still view England as hostile territory in terms of environment and football. It is usually associated with rain and steak and kidney pies, a combination that would depress even the most courageous Brazilian players.

Countries such as Portugal, Italy, Spain and France have traditionally offered cultural similarities (mainly language and food) to Brazilians, as well as a less shocking difference in climatic conditions. But Germany has also become a popular destination since the mid-1980s. Now the picture is changing rapidly: in 2005 one out of four Brazilian players who moved abroad had what might be termed an exotic or unorthodox destination – Vietnam, for example, received 16, only four fewer than the total number of Brazilians who have ever tried their luck in England.

Big money is not an issue in those moves. The deplorable financial state of Brazil's domestic game has led many players to go abroad for even quite modest wages and to lower division teams. One of the great attractions is that, unlike in Brazil, even at major clubs, they receive payment on time.

The five Brazilians in the Premiership are Gilberto Silva, Denilson and Julio Baptista at Arsenal, Fabio Aurelio at Liverpool and Fabio Rochemback at Middlesbrough.

The Gunners are the only English side in which Brazilian players have managed to really thrive or win silverware – Gilberto and Edu, now at Valencia, have both won league and FA Cup trophies.

Although Arsenal will not win any trophies this season, their Brazilian contingent have had a successful time. Gilberto has arguably been one of the club's top players this season, scoring goals on top of his midfield duties and even deputising as captain in the absence of Thierry Henry. Young midfielder Denilson looks more and more comfortable with the Premiership pace, and the fact that Arsene Wenger is reportedly trying to secure Baptista's services on a permanent basis from Real Madrid suggests the striker has convinced.

In contrast, Aurelio has tended to be only a substitute at Liverpool. Up to the end of March, he had made only eight league starts since joining last summer. Rochemback had made only six starts with Boro.

That's the story for most of the Brazilians who come to these shores, but conversely their compatriots' poor record in England helps to explain the reluctance shown by some clubs to sign any more.

It all started in 1987, when Mirandinha joined Newcastle. After a promising first season, he failed to steer the club away from relegation the following term. Even so, he scored 20 goals in 54 league games in all. Since then, there have been more misses than hits, including the pathetic displays of World Cup winners Branco and Roque Junior for Middlesbrough and Leeds respectively.

The funniest thing is that a lot of Brazilian players, including the stars, are complimentary about the Premiership. They will talk about the atmosphere at the stadiums, the players' commitment and the quality of the pitches. But when push comes to shove, they choose to go somewhere else. Ronaldinho was hardly willing to join Manchester United in 2003 and actually used the club's interest to get a better deal from Barcelona. Marcos, the goalkeeper who helped Brazil win the 2002 World Cup, had talks with Arsenal around the same time but never really set his heart on coming to London.

Grecian 2002

Meanwhile, less-renowned compatriots started finding homes at lower-level English clubs. Defender Santos Gaia joined Exeter City in 2002 and even scored in an FA Cup tie against Charlton, although his most famous performance for the Grecians came three years later, in a 0-0 draw against Manchester United at Old Trafford. Nowadays, he plays in the Conference (fifth level) with Stevenage.

Perhaps the floodgates at the top level would open if a high-profile Brazilian moved to the Premiership, even if he were past his prime. Kaka is one player who has spoken more than fondly about the Premiership, but Real Madrid and Barcelona would undoubtedly be in the frame to sign him when he eventually leaves Milan.

In general, Brazilians have a higher regard for the big Spanish clubs than, say, Manchester United or Chelsea, not only because many of Brazil's star players are or have played in La Liga and Serie A but also because games from those leagues have been broadcast regularly for more than a decade in Brazil – sometimes even on free-to-air channels – while the Premiership has been shown only intermittently.

English football also faces the old stereotypes about the lack of skills and the use of long balls, something that could be blamed on the insularity of the game in England throughout most of its history. It can be changed, especially with "case studies" such as Thierry Henry and Cristiano Ronaldo. Perhaps Brazilians will pay more attention to the English game when there is more trickery and eyecatching goals. Julio Baptista could help a lot with this by hitting the back of the net as much as he can. ●

Fernando Duarte is the UK correspondent of Brazilian newspaper O Globo

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FERNANDO DUARTE
in London

> **"Since Mirandinha left Newcastle there have been more misses than hits, including the pathetic displays of Branco and Roque Junior"**

Silver spoon to silverware

The Milan and Brazil midfielder has become a star by allying the advantages of his affluent upbringing with hard work and natural talent. By Tim Vickery

A DECADE AGO, when Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten started winning major tennis titles, there was an explosion of interest in the sport in his homeland. Newspapers explained the rules, cable TV channels broadcast the games and thousands began playing. Some predicted that Brazil would soon be producing a steady supply of Grand Slam winners.

Those close to the action knew better. To become a champion at tennis, a middle-class sport in Brazil as in many other countries, requires hard work and dedication as well as talent. But, in comparison with Europe and North America, Brazilian middle-class kids are often reluctant to get their hands dirty. As local tennis specialist Sylvio Bastos explained back in 2000: "Our normal middle-class kids are protected and spoiled. I coached in Long Island for two years and I saw rich American kids going to cut their neighbour's lawn, happy to be earning a few dollars for themselves. Here, work is seen as a punishment. The kids ask their parents for money to spend the day at the beach."

With his willingness to accept risk and responsibility, shouldering the need to win today to pay tomorrow's hotel bill, Kuerten was a one-off.

So is Kaka. The 24-year-old Milan star, the son of an engineer, is from a background much more associated with playboys than footballers. But he has taken full value from his upbringing. Where many turn the safety net of privilege into a hammock, he has used it as a trampoline, allying the advantages of his background with hard work, intelligence and natural talent to become one of the most decisive players in the world game.

Bandanna boy...Kaka and Rivaldo celebrate the 2002 World Cup win

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From Heleno de Freitas to Leonardo, there have been plenty of Brazilian players from wealthy backgrounds but it is hard to think of one who has had the same drive as Kaka. Where Socrates, for example, was full of laid-back philosophising, his game adorned with cheeky back-heels, Kaka is a pistons-pumping, skill-with-no-frills type of player.

Followers of German social scientist Max Weber will not be surprised to learn that the young Brazilian and his parents are Protestants. Weber argued that Protestantism had helped produce a new kind of mentality, raising steady work and industry to the status of virtues. In recent decades evangelical Protestantism has made huge strides in Brazil, especially among the poor. The shift to the right of the Catholic church and its reduced focus on social problems created a vacuum that has been filled by a range of Protestant organisations.

The church in which Kaka grew up – Renascer (rebirth) – is slightly different. It caters specifically for a middle-class congregation, and has more in keeping with the Protestantism that Weber would have recognised. This, in the words of economic historian David Landes, aimed at "the making of a new kind of man – rational, ordered, diligent, productive". It is a perfect description of Kaka.

In March 2002, in one of his first major interviews, Kaka made very clear the links between his faith and a desire for worldly success. "When I stray from the path of God, I cry," he said, while also cheerfully admitting that part of his function in the Sao Paulo team was to commit deliberate fouls in order to stop a counter-attack at source. He also unapologetically placed his football in a business context. "I see myself as a company," he said. "I'm providing a service to Sao Paulo. I have to do it well. If my company is running well, then my client, Sao Paulo, will be satisfied with me. And so I'll be receiving, earning. And I'll go in search of a bigger client, the national team or a foreign club. If Sao Paulo need to sell my services, then they can do it."

FACT FILE

Full name Ricardo Izecson Santos Leite
Born May 15, 1982, in Brasilia
Country Brazil
Club Milan (Ita)
Previous club Sao Paulo
International debut January 2002, v Bolivia
International caps 44 (15 goals)
Honours Confederations Cup 2005; Italian League 2004; Italian Supercup 2005; Rio-Sao Paulo tournament 2001

In full flight...Kaka outpaces Argentina's defence to score a superb individual goal in Brazil's 3-0 win in a friendly in London

Home star...Kaka holds off Paulo Assuncao in a Sao Paulo-Palmeiras cup tie

Early potential

Kaka Ltd was an undertaking that showed potential from its earliest stages. When he was seven his mother, Simone, was advised by his physical education teacher to enrol him in a football school. The Sao Paulo club was nearby. Kaka became a member, and did so well that in 1997, aged 15, he was taken on as part of the youth team. It left him facing a dilemma. Unlike the vast majority of his peers, he had options about his career. What should he do? His parents helped.

"They showed me the difficulties I'd face in becoming a footballer, and those of studying to become an engineer like my dad. Then they said: 'Now it's up to you. You'll find problems and pleasures on both paths, but the choice is yours and we'll support it.'"

So football it was. This obviously brought him into contact with boys from very different backgrounds. In a competitive environment, the potential for conflict was clear. Again, the actions and attitudes of his parents came to the rescue.

Bosco Leite's profession had imposed a nomadic existence on the family. His son, christened Ricardo Izecson Santos Leite, was born in Brasilia, moved south to Curitiba at the age of four, and then to Sao Paulo three years later. His father says: "We have a privileged position in life, but we know how hard it is to be away from your family. Because of this we used to invite the boys who lodged at the club to spend their day off with us." Years later, Kaka commented that "perhaps this is why I never suffered prejudice because I came from a different social class". In the eternal

> **My parents showed me the difficulties I'd face becoming a footballer and of studying to be an engineer like my dad, then said: 'Now it's up to you'**

meritocracy of football, it also helped that he could play.

But an accident at a water park in October 2000 nearly threw the whole project off the rails. He cracked his spine against the bottom of the swimming pool, and there were fears of permanent damage. In the event, two months of treatment were needed.

Kaka, methodical as ever, drew up a 10-point plan while recuperating to get his career back on track (see panel). It seemed ludicrously ambitious. After all, at the start of 2001 he was only a substitute for Sao Paulo's junior side. But, astonishingly, when he stepped on to the field in June the following year to face Costa Rica in a World Cup finals match he had crossed nine steps off his list.

It all started when coach Oswaldo Alvarez took a chance in promoting him to Sao Paulo's professional squad. Then he scored twice as the senior side beat Botafogo in the Final of the Rio-Sao Paulo tournament.

The phenomenon was born. The press had been referring to him as "Caca" – the nickname coming from his younger brother's inability to say Ricardo. The goalscoring hero took the opportunity to announce that he preferred his name to be spelt with Ks – and so it has been ever since.

For the next few months Brazil fell in love with Kaka. Teenage girls swooned every time the ball came his way, pundits went light-headed at what he did with it. Tostao was a fan right from the start. In March 2002, the former international wrote: "The great player simplifies things. He doesn't waste time or get confused. This is what most enchants me about Kaka. He passes, receives, shoots, and does it all with excellent technique. Kaka is ready for this World Cup."

In the event, Kaka went to Japan and South Korea more for the experience than anything else, and was restricted to a few minutes as a substitute in that Costa Rica game, the final one in the group, when Brazil had already qualified for the knockout stages. And although he came back with a winner's medal, it was the start of a problem period.

10 STEPS TO SUCCESS

The plan drawn up by Kaka at the end of 2000 when he was recovering from his swimming pool accident

1) Play again
2) Get taken on by Sao Paulo as a professional
3) Become part of the senior Sao Paulo squad of 25
4) Get into the squad of 18 involved in the games
5) Get into the starting line-up
6) Play in the World Youth Cup
7) Be called up to the senior Brazil squad
8) Play for Brazil
9) Play in the World Cup
10) Move to a major club in Italy or Spain

Points 1 to 9 were covered in little more than 18 months, and just over a year later he could cross off point 10 as well.

New boy...at Milan

Pressure rising

Winning the Rio-Sao Paulo title was all very well, but in truth it was little more than a pre-season trophy. Sao Paulo had not won the national title since 1991, and although they had won the Libertadores Cup more recently, in 1993, they had failed to even qualify for the tournament since the following year. The pressure to win major silverware was rising, but in the big games they kept falling short.

Sao Paulo, the club of the city elite, were pejoratively known as the "Bambis". Kaka, with his wealthy background, was Bambi-in-chief, and it was him the fans turned against when success continued to elude the team.

Many were worried about the effect this was having on Kaka, among them Regina Brandao, the sports psychologist who worked with the national team at the 2002 World Cup. "When a player stands out, the expectations can be very high," she said. "He has to constantly reproduce the same level of performance, which is too much responsibility for a kid of 20 like Kaka."

He also picked up injuries, which some put down to an increase in weight and muscular mass – in the two years to January 2003 he gained 11 kilos.

But Kaka hit back when accused of being prone to disappear when most needed. He called it "unfair", adding: "What I most like are the big, decisive games." In fact, he was keen to accept responsibility. If people were looking to him to carry the team to titles it was a sign that he was a growing force. Typically, he was drawing lessons from the negative experience. Soon after moving to Italy, with Milan in August 2003, he reflected that "the boos and criticism I suffered in Brazil were important in teaching me about how football can function like a see-saw".

The consensus in Brazil was that he would struggle in Italy. His prestige at home was low and he was behind Rivaldo in the national team's pecking order, so if Rivaldo could not get a regular place in the Milan side, what chance did Kaka stand, especially with Rui Costa also around?

However, he confounded the critics by proving an instant hit. Coach Carlo Ancelotti had known next to nothing about the youngster but quickly found his best position. With Sao Paulo, Kaka had occasionally played as a striker. Most often, though, he had operated too deep. Trying to do too much, he was picking up possession on the edge of his own penalty area and then leading the charge forward with his characteristically direct style. It left the team stretched and vulnerable whenever the move broke down. Ancelotti placed him closer to the strikers, with three midfielders behind him for protection, so he was picking up the ball some 40 metres from goal. Kaka thrived on it. He seemed tailor-made for the European game.

But, once again, this success had as much to do with his approach as with his football. Towards the end of his second season in Italy he said: "I think my differential in relation to other Brazilians who haven't done well here is the fact that I want to play in Europe. I decided to use this opportunity not just professionally but also to grow as a person. I chose to be a part of here, to learn. When I arrived, I thought that the degree of difficulty would be 10, but I found

Big stage...Kaka makes his World Cup finals debut against Costa Rica in 2002

"When I arrived in Milan I thought the degree of difficulty would be 10 but I found it was five. I like everything I'm living here"

it was five. I like everything I'm living here. I love the food, and I learned the language, and of course this helps me bond with my team-mates."

He struck up a firm friendship with Andrii Shevchenko, and the bond between playmaker and striker paid dividends on the field. "Kaka is younger than me," said the Ukrainian, "but when we talk he seems much older. He's intelligent, generous and curious."

With Shevchenko having moved on, and old-stagers Paolo Maldini and Alessandro Costacurta nearing the end of their careers, Kaka has become increasingly important at Milan. "He's become a reference point of the team," Ancelotti says. "He's a talented player, a person of character and a great professional who has won everyone's respect." The club have him under contract until 2011, but Real Madrid continue to make their admiration known.

The same qualities that have made Kaka such an influential figure at Milan – the rational application of his expensive schooling – have also helped him secure his space in the Brazil team. "He exerts a natural leadership, which comes from his personality," says midfielder Emerson. "People can see that he can express himself, that he's had a good education. So when he gives an opinion, everyone listens. He's different from those players who either make direct criticisms or prefer to sit on the fence. He thinks deeply, and can state his position without creating controversy."

In September 2003, in the first round of the 2006 World Cup qualifiers, Kaka came off the bench to score a blistering winner away to Colombia. It put Brazil on course to reach Germany without any of the problems they had suffered in the qualifiers for 2002, and it paved the way for his regular place in the starting line-up.

But for all his growing influence, Brazil remained essentially Ronaldo's team. Kaka was quick to see that, in order for the "magic quartet" system – Ronaldo, Adriano, Ronaldinho and himself – to work, he and Ronaldinho would have to take on extra duties. "At Milan I don't have to worry about marking," he said shortly before last year's World Cup, "and it's the same with Ronaldinho at Barcelona. But for Brazil, with just two other midfielders, we'll have to help out further back, which changes our style of play."

History shows that it did not work, either for Brazil or for Kaka. After his match-winning performance in the first group game against Croatia, he got steadily worse, worn out by the demands being made upon him. He was less than 100 per cent fit for the quarter-final against France, and was replaced after 78 ineffective minutes.

Happily for him, the idea of the magic quartet was buried with the World Cup elimination. New coach Dunga felt that Brazil's midfield in Germany was not only poor defensively but also failed to generate controlled possession.

In came Elano to provide balance. It appears that Ronaldinho will have to fight for the support striker's slot, while Kaka has the chance to do what he does best, operate behind the strikers with three midfielders behind him.

But it is not an opportunity that has been handed to him on a plate. Anxious to stress team over stars, Dunga initially made a point of leaving out the big names. For the coach's second match in charge, against Argentina in London last September, Kaka was back in the squad, but left on the bench.

"That's no problem," he said, "as long as the same criterion is used for everyone." And then he wasted no time showing that he was in a class of his own. Brought on just before the hour, he set up one goal before scoring a marvellous solo effort, running almost the entire length of the field to seal Brazil's 3-0 victory. Kaka followed that with the winner against both Ecuador and Switzerland later on in the autumn. He was also captain against the Swiss.

Kaka can be considered Brazil's most important player on merit, and he could not have it any other way. ●

CLASS APART

A number of football's leading lights have come from wealthy backgrounds. The family of former Italy striker Gianluca Vialli made millions from the construction industry and famously lived in a castle in Cremona.

Fernando Redondo

Castle...Vialli

(ex-Argentina, Real Madrid and Milan) was nicknamed The Little Prince for his elegant style on the pitch, but also because he came from a wealthy family who made their money from a meat production business.

The father of Andrea Pirlo (Milan and Italy) owns a steel mill, while the family of former Germany striker Oliver Bierhoff made a fortune from the energy industry. Emilio Butragueno (ex-Real Madrid) was the son of a jewellery store owner in Madrid.

Former Brazilian internationals Leonardo, Tostao and brothers Socrates and Rai all have middle-class backgrounds.

Princely...Redondo

Still learning...Kaka listens to Brazil boss Dunga

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'God knows what my future holds'

Milan, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho...the midfielder opens up

This season has been difficult for Milan, hasn't it?
Fortune has not really been on our side. I don't particularly believe in the theory that we are suffering from post-World Cup fatigue. I feel good at the moment. I'm in top condition. Playing every three days can cause difficulties but it's the same for all the top sides. The important thing is not to lose your nerve and play your way out of a poor run. That's what we've been doing. Since the turn of the year, our results have improved markedly and we're looking much more like our old selves in both Serie A and in Europe. Milan is a club for winners. We've proved it in the past and will do so again. In individual and collective terms, Milan can be a match for anyone.

How do you feel about Milan reaching the Champions League quarter-finals?
I don't think enough has been made of the fact that Milan are the only quarter-finalists from last year's Champions League still standing this season. We should be proud of our consistency at this high level. Even in a tough season for us, we have found the force of character to make progress in Europe. Why have lots of top teams gone out of the Champions League this term? It's simply because the competition is fiercer. Any team, on their day, can make life difficult for one of the supposedly bigger names. You have to be constantly on your guard, whether facing top clubs or those with less prestige. It's the same in Serie A. Smaller teams have become tougher nuts to crack. They put lots of players behind the ball and it's hard to break them down.

What do you see as your role at Milan?
When I first came to Milan in 2003, my aim was to combine Brazilian flair with European tactical rigour, and I hope I've succeeded in achieving it.

How do you get on with the coach, Carlo Ancelotti?
I've a special relationship with him. We can have different opinions sometimes but underlying everything is a great mutual respect.

How has the arrival of Ronaldo changed things?
It has done us a lot of good. He's a striker who can decide a game at any moment and still has much to offer. Of course, the fact that there are Brazilians at Milan played a part in his decision to come here. But much more important in his choice was his familiarity with the city of Milan and his desire to remain in football at the very highest level. It's hard for me to talk about Ronaldo. I was a fan of his as a kid and dreamed of playing like him one day. Now I've the chance to play regularly with this legend.

Do you think Ronaldinho will join the Brazilian clan at Milan?
He knows he'll be made welcome. I really enjoy playing with him, Fred and Robinho in a four-man attack for Brazil. This formula can work well for any team, even in Italy. The crucial factor is that all the attackers are prepared to make sacrifices. If there's a good collective spirit, I don't see a problem.

Have you tried to persuade Ronaldinho to join?
During a recent training camp with Brazil I was telling Ronaldinho every day that he should come and join us, but unfortunately my efforts were being countered by [Internazionale keeper] Julio Cesar, who kept telling him that he should stay at Barcelona because the weather in Milan is not so good and we don't have the sea there.

Where do you think you'll be next season?
I hope I'll still be with Milan. This is one of the premier clubs in the world and from the first moment I entered their Milanello training complex I was aware that I had joined a very special club. This is a club used to winning, where people demand results. But only God knows what my future holds.

Interview by John Holmesdale

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums
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Le boss

The new UEFA president sets out his stall on the Champions League, European Championship and World Cup rotation

ONE OF THE items in your election manifesto was to reduce the number of clubs from England, Italy and Spain in the Champions League. Why?
I want to add some clubs from other countries to the competition, and to do that we have to take something away. It's a question of my philosophy. Are we making a competition to make more and more money? Or are we making a competition where the kids in the Czech Republic can see Wayne Rooney? When I lived in Metz I saw Di Stefano, a big player, in my city. But nowadays, you can forget that.

Are you not worried that television revenue might go down if you have less glamorous teams in the Champions League?
Don't get me wrong, I don't want to disturb the future of the competition. It's a question of balance. I'm not sure that the fourth-placed club in Italy, Spain or England is more important than the champions of great footballing countries such as Denmark, the Czech Republic or Poland.

You could still have the situation, as in this season, where you have three English clubs in the quarter-finals.
It's not about disturbing England, Italy or Spain, but about finding a good balance. My problem is that the two English, Spanish and Italian teams in the final qualifying round do not play against each other, they play against smaller teams. Perhaps the third and fourth team in England could be drawn together, so they don't take the place of a smaller team in the group stage.

Has the romance gone out of the competition?
No. Football can still be beautiful, it is still the most beautiful sport in the world. My glass is half full!

How do you plan to deal with racism?
By being radical. For me, what happened two years ago in Holland, when the referee stopped a game [because there was racist chanting], is the best situation. If the referee on the day decides to stop the game for five minutes, he should stop the game.

Will you be pushing for Europe to host the 2018 World Cup?
Of course, in Belgium and Holland [laughs]. Ah, sorry, we are in England! Of course, as president of UEFA, I will push to have that World Cup in Europe. It's not so democratic to have the competition in Europe every third time when there are six confederations, but I will do my best.

This seems to be the one area where you disagree with Sepp Blatter.
We have already spoken about rotation back to Europe every three World Cups.

But last week he said the opposite.
Ah yes, but next week he'll say something else! No, it is not easy for Mr Blatter to say to everybody that they are beautiful. My job is to push for Europe.

Isn't it hypocritical to push for a World Cup in Europe when you also say that TV markets should not influence a competition?
No, it's not for financial reasons. We have to have the World Cup in Europe. I would like to have the World Cup in Europe every four years, but that will not be possible. We will try to convince people that rotation of the World Cup [so that it comes to Europe] every third time is necessary.

Would you like to see the World Cup and European Championship played more often?
No, I like everything as it is. I'm very traditional. What is scarce is precious.

What about the European Championship increasing in size to 24 countries from 16?
The only thing I can say is that it is too late to do anything for 2008 or 2012, so 2016 would be the first. You can't talk about 24 teams without talking about the qualifiers. If you have 24 teams, it means you can have a straight knockout qualifying round, over two legs, and for the rest of the time you play friendlies. If it is good for the game, good for Europe, good for the leagues, good for the national associations, then we will do it, we are not stupid.

What do you think when you hear Arsene Wenger blaming the French federation for contributing to Thierry Henry's injury problems?
Wenger can say what he wants, but I cannot understand why Henry is injured in March because of a game he played in August.

Is there more pressure on players now than in your day?
No, they don't play more games than I did.

What about the media pressure?
I don't know because I didn't speak to the press! Seriously, there is economic pressure, but most of the time it comes from agents.

How would you describe UEFA's relationship with FIFA?
Mr Blatter knows UEFA now has a leader he can trust. Before, there was a fight between UEFA and FIFA, it was not possible to have agreement. Now we can work together.

Is it important that you are the first former player to be UEFA president?
A big majority of people are happy that an ex-player is president of UEFA. But I'm not president of UEFA, I'm the leader of UEFA. I was elected as president, but I am not a typical president. I'm a leader with a new philosophy. I was elected because I'm a football person, not a committee person. ●

Interview by Gavin Hamilton

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums
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International rescue

The midfielder is back in the Argentina squad four years after his last appearance

JUAN SEBASTIAN VERON returned to Argentina last year to his first club, Estudiantes de La Plata, after a decade in Europe with six clubs. He won the opening championship and was named best player, along with team-mate Hugo Pavone. Now, at the age of 32, he has been called up to the national team – albeit a squad of home-based players – for the first time since 2003, when he won his 73rd cap.

What has it been like to be back in the Argentinian League?
Last year was perfect for me because of Estudiantes winning the title and the fact I was able to keep up my standard of play. That was important because I was under a fair amount of scrutiny from the media.

Why Estudiantes?
Boca Juniors and River Plate showed interest in me, but it isn't the same playing for those teams, where everything is magnified, whether it's good or bad. I needed to play for a smaller club, and it proved to be way above my expectations.

Did you return to take revenge on your critics by showing you can still play?
Every Argentinian player who moves to Europe thinks about returning, but revenge is not in my vocabulary. It was very important for me, for my family, my father [Juan Ramon, who played for Estudiantes and is now a club director] and mother. My standard of play is the same as in Europe during the past few years.

Were you surprised to be called up again by Argentina?
I had not looked to see if I was in the squad for years. But my hopes were renewed after Alfio Basile became coach [last September] because we all started from zero with him; they were even higher this time as he was picking a squad of home-based players only. I am especially happy because my son will now be able to say that his father plays for Argentina. He was only three when I played my last international. I'm as happy as when I was called up for the first time in 1996.

Was it clear that Basile's predecessor, Jose Pekerman, did not have you in his plans?
Yes. He spoke to everyone except me. That was the sign that I would never be called up, and I had to accept it. Then it was said that [captain Juan Pablo] Sorin criticised me to Pekerman following a disagreement we had had that began because Sorin left a house I had lent him in a very bad condition.

Would you find it impossible to play in the same team as Sorin now?
The relationship would not be the same, but I don't have to be his friend to play in the same team. The coach will decide to pick one of us or the other or both. If it comes to that, we will first talk and a solution will be found.

What about your relationship with Juan Roman Riquelme?
I know I am supposed to have had a conflict with him, but there was never any truth in that. I was supposed to have said something bad about him but I called him up and everything was OK. Not so long ago we talked on a flight back from Europe and later played together in a benefit match. He is an important player for Argentina and I hope he changes his mind about not playing for the national team again.

Do you have any thoughts about playing in the 2010 World Cup, which would be your third finals?
For me it's important to get back into the national squad; I'm not thinking in the long-term. But I hope being involved in the national team lengthens my career and that I can play until I'm 40. When you are in the national team you have more enthusiasm, you overcome tiredness more easily and, if injured, you clench your teeth and carry on. But I'll be 35 in 2010, and perhaps much better players will have appeared by then.

What about this year's Copa America?
You never know. Once, I got into the national team because Fernando Redondo refused a call-up. We all dream, but there's a long way to go. The Copa America is very important and Basile is intent on winning it. It will be a true test of whether he has confidence in me.

At Estudiantes you are the midfield "linkman". Where do you see yourself in the national team?
Basile knows how I play, but I don't see myself as a linkman for Argentina. There are other players with a different style who are better in that position. But I will play wherever he needs me.

Many players regard you as a leader. Do you?
No, I wouldn't call myself a leader. What you get with me is a person with character who always says what he thinks. But I am not always fighting, as some people say I am, and that can be seen in my relationship with the Estudiantes players. In the national team you can have differences with some team-mates as they are not all friends.

What sort of reception are you expecting from the fans since you were the chief scapegoat for the group stage exit at the 2002 World Cup?
I don't know and I don't care. If they whistle, it will not worry me. On the contrary, it will make me feel important. After 2002, I realised that the only people who value your efforts are your team-mates. The others don't care that you were not in the best physical shape. They always have to find somebody to blame for defeat. Last year it was Riquelme, and that wasn't fair either. ●

Interview by Eric Weil

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Headway

The Chelsea keeper is back in action after fracturing his skull

PETR CECH suffered his career-threatening head injury after colliding with Reading's Stephen Hunt during a league game in October. But the Chelsea and Czech Republic keeper returned after a three-month lay-off, having received special clearance from the authorities to wear a rugby-style protective headguard.

Did you worry about your safety when you made your comeback?
Not at all. This is the same game now as it was before I was injured and I still enjoy my football just as much. I worked hard to regain my fitness, my form and my confidence, and it immediately felt both good and natural to be back in action. The only issue I had was that I felt a little lacking in physical strength and reaction speed.

Why the headguard?
The medical experts said I should wear it as insurance, because this was a rare injury and they wanted me to wear it until they were satisfied there was no risk of further damage. It was strange at first but I soon got used to playing in it. Maybe one day all goalkeepers will wear such protection. It's like in ice-hockey – when I was young, none of the players wore helmets, and now everyone has them. Games develop and become quicker, harder and stronger. In football there have been more head injuries for goalkeepers recently. You have to dive much more at the feet of attackers, and when the ball is in the air you can collide with heads and elbows.

Have you had the all-clear from the doctors?
I do not have to take any medication any more and I am now allowed to drive my car again. I had very bad headaches at first but I do not get these any more. Of course, the medical staff keep a close watch on me and I will have some more tests at the end of the season.

Jose Mourinho quickly restored you to the first team. How did that feel?
It's good for every player to feel he has the confidence of the manager and good that he had that confidence despite the injury. I heard he said having me fit again was like signing a £50million player. But when you are on the pitch it doesn't matter how much they paid for you or think you are worth, you have to always play well if you want to keep winning and be in the first team.

How did you come to make your return against Liverpool at Anfield in January?
Of course, the manager picks the team but it was up to me to say whether I felt fully fit. That was crucial. I said I wanted to feel 100 per cent fit or I would not play – and I felt 100 per cent. That meant that I didn't think back to the accident. Once you are on the pitch you should not think about anything else but the game. Your body should do that automatically – and that is exactly what happened.

John Terry also suffered a bad head injury in the League Cup Final against Arsenal. How did that make you feel?
It sent lots of emotions running around in my head, even though I was at the other end of the pitch. I just walked around my penalty area to try to switch off from what was happening while he was being treated. I didn't even ask what had happened to John because I felt it was better for me not to know. But after I saw him moving I felt better. That is always a good sign!

What did the League Cup win mean to you?
Of course, at the start of the season we did not see the League Cup as the most important trophy but we are professionals so we want to win every game and every trophy available. It was also important because it was the first trophy of the season – our success sends out a message to all the other teams we will play in all the other competitions. Of course, it was not easy. Arsenal were very strong opponents and it was a big problem when John Terry was injured. It shows our spirit and determination that we went on to win.

Can the fans expect more trophies this season?
Of course, why not? We have another three trophies to play for – the Premiership, the FA Cup and the Champions League. The quadruple would be a great achievement. No English club has ever achieved that, so it would be great to make history. Yes, that means I also believe we can overtake Manchester United in the Premiership.

You honestly believe Chelsea can win the Premier League for a third successive year?
Of course. We have been through a difficult period over the past few months but the gap between Manchester United and us is no different than it was before. We can be very positive because all our big players will be back. United are not unbeatable. They still have to come to Stamford Bridge and they have other difficult games left, so they can drop points. ●

Interview by Keir Radnedge

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Reds letters day...the new Liverpool owners display personalised shirts

Billionaires' playthings

Liverpool are the latest English club to be taken over by foreign investors, but there is little concern among fans that the new owners are in it merely to make a profit.
By David Conn

WITH THE WAVE of overseas billionaires acquiring England's greatest football clubs, a new era is beginning. The future lies with these rich men who, even as they roll out prepared speeches about how the history and heritage of the clubs attracted them, cannot help but drift into money talk, enthusing about "global media revenues", "new technologies" and "expansion into Asia".

They see huge earnings ahead from the Premier League's burgeoning worldwide appeal, while at the same time the clubs want short-term investment to give them a chance of competing with Chelsea, backed by Roman Abramovich's billions. So Liverpool were desperate for the backing of Americans Tom Hicks and George Gillett, both sports franchise owners in North America, to build a new, £200million stadium to enable the club to catch up with Chelsea as well as Manchester United and Arsenal. Hicks and Gillett, meanwhile, see the profits to be made just over the horizon.

The arrival of these investors – a procession of sober, Forbes-list, US businessmen rather than the Russian oligarchs previously expected – has meant the end for several former English club owners. These men, mostly local, said they had taken their club as far as they could and have sold out for staggering amounts of money.

Profit forecast...Gillett and Hicks think there's money to be made at Liverpool

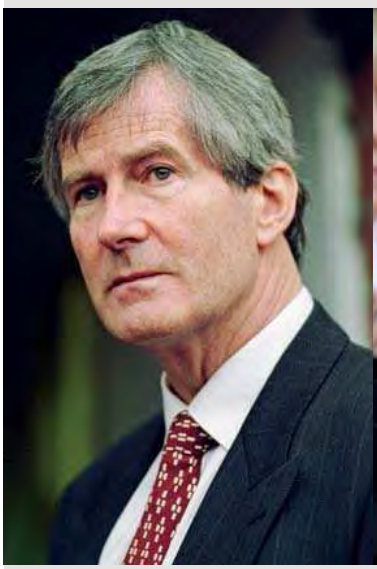
The highest earner from these recent sales to foreign investors is former Liverpool chairman David Moores, who had held a 51.5 per stake in the club. He is a scion of the Littlewoods pools and retailing family and inherited the millions he originally put into the club. Moores, a Liverpool fan, also took over some of the shares held by the family dynasty since they shored up Bill Shankly's creaking club in the 1960s. He bought more shares and made his most significant investment in June 1994.

Financially, that phase was similar to now: there were massive earnings ahead for the clubs newly inducted into the Premier League, but they needed money there and then to convert their grounds into all-seaters to comply with the post-Hillsborough disaster legislation. Moores paid around £8m for 15,164 new shares in the club, in a rights issue that raised £9.3m altogether. This allowed Liverpool to develop their treasured Kop stand, including the installation of seats. Altogether, the chairman paid a reported £12m for his total shareholding in the club.

No salary for Moores

Moores has never been a businessman, and has never sought the limelight as other football directors have. Nor did he ever take a salary or dividend payments from the club he seems to love genuinely. Yet throughout the discussions about a takeover – which Liverpool's chief executive, Rick Parry, came to see as vital – there was never much question about Moores accepting anything other than a high price for giving up control.

CASHING IN Who's made what from the Premier League boom



£93m
Martin Edwards
(Manchester United)

£89.6m
David Moores
(Liverpool)

£33.4m
Terry Brown
(West Ham)

When Hicks and Gillett stormed through in February to gazump Dubai International Capital, whose deliberations had given Moores uneasy sweats, they agreed to pay £174.1m for Liverpool's entire stock. That valued each share at £5,000. Moores owned 17,923 shares, and so the cheque, sent to his home, in accordance with the formal offer document, within 14 days of him accepting the offer, was for a sum above any of those that ever transformed the life of a pools winner: £89,615,000.

We were told, again, that the money was not important to him. Business is business, a "market" price had to be paid, but, Liverpool sources said, Moores was only concerned with ensuring the club went to people who would guide and govern it to future success, while preserving the traditions and dignity that Liverpool had maintained under Moores and Parry. Parry said that when the deal was done, it was "the worst day of David's life" – despite that incredible return – because the club had gone to new owners.

Many owners of Moores' generation bought a majority stake in their club long before the Premier League breakaway and the emergence of satellite TV that made the clubs such lucrative assets. Martin Edwards' father, Louis, was a Salford meat wholesaler and Manchester United fanatic who bought his first shares in the 1950s, then bought more and became chairman in the 1960s, though he appeared to love only the involvement. Louis seems never to have regarded United as a financial investment until the late 1970s, when his meat business was in trouble.

> **"Many English club owners have sold out for staggering amounts of money"**

Villa view...Lerner

Martin, public school educated, grew up with United as a family business. In 1989, he agreed to sell his shares for £10m to the improbable Michael Knighton. When that deal fell through, United floated on the stock market instead, and Edwards made money from his stake by selling it in chunks. By 2002, when he sold most of his remaining shares to Scottish mining entrepreneur Harry Dobson, his total takings from the shares, which originally cost the family around £1m, came to £93m. His dividends and salary over more than 20 years came to several more millions.

Doug Ellis, who finally took his leave of Aston Villa last August by selling to American Randy Lerner, the billionaire former chairman of the MBNA credit card company, made £29m in total from his involvement in Villa. He bought his large stake in 1982, just after Villa won the European Cup, for somewhere under £500,000.

Ken Bates, who bought the financially clapped-out Chelsea for £1 in 1982, received £17m from selling the club to Abramovich in 2003.

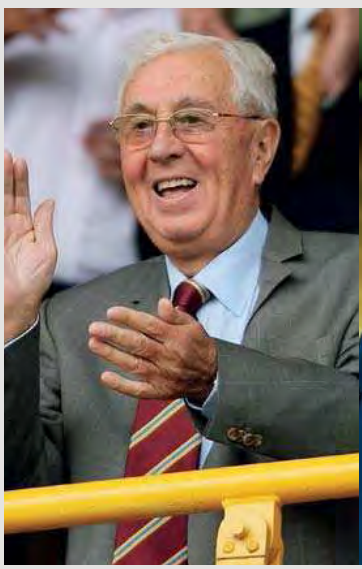
At West Ham, Terry Brown hit the jackpot at the end of last year by selling his shares in a club on the skids to Icelandic businessmen Bjorgolfur Gudmundsson and Eggert Magnusson. Their remarkable £85m valuation of West Ham meant that Brown was paid £33.4m for his 7,392,000 shares. Charles Warner and Martin Cearns, descendants of the two original founding families of the Hammers, received £17.9m and £7.8m respectively for their stake in the club.

Noades sells up

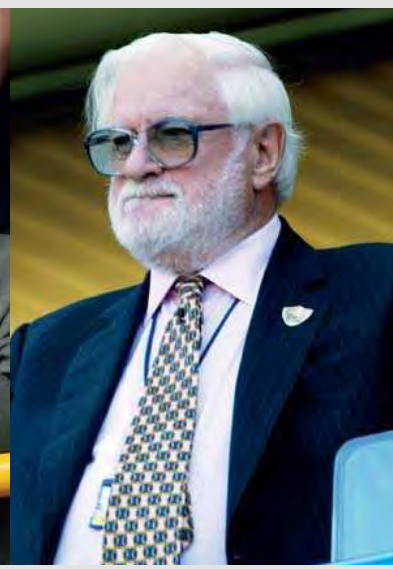
Ron Noades, who sold Crystal Palace to Mark Goldberg for £17m during the last bout of frenzied club share-shuffling in 1997, finally sold the club's Selhurst Park ground, too, at the end of last year. The price of £12m, paid by a London property company that the club's present owner, Simon Jordan, said was acting as his nominee, took Noades' earnings from selling Palace to £29m.

Other club owners are lining up to sell out. Sir John Hall and his son, Douglas, are known to be keen to sell their shares in Newcastle, although Freddy Shepherd, the other major shareholder and chairman, opposed recent takeover attempts and seems inclined to hold on. Manchester City say they are "in talks" with unnamed American investors.

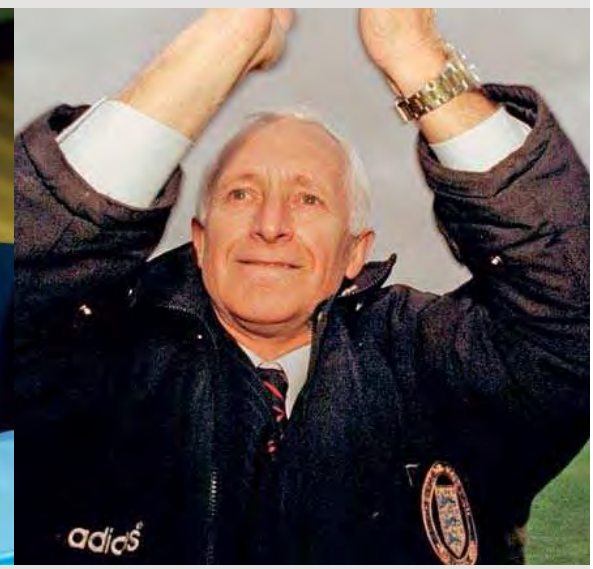
The fierce "not for sale" protests



£29m
Doug Ellis
(Aston Villa)



£17m
Ken Bates
(Chelsea)



£17m
Ron Noades
(Crystal Palace)

by Manchester United fans against the 2005 takeover by Malcolm Glazer and his Florida-based family turns out to have created a misleading impression. It seemed likely that supporters generally would be hostile to their beloved clubs, temples of local belonging, falling into the hands of speculators from overseas. United fans first organised in the mid-1990s to oppose steep ticket price rises, heavy-handed stewarding and the decline of atmosphere at the increasingly commercialised Old Trafford. The campaign was lifted to sophisticated heights in 1998 to fight the proposed £625m takeover by BSkyB.

That battle, which they ultimately won, was influenced by, and in turn influenced, wider moves to understand the roots and hearts of the clubs, and rediscover the idea that their structures should reflect the sense of popular belonging that they embody.

Disaffected fans

The supporters' trust movement can be said to have been born in 1992 in a pub, the Butchers Arms, where Brian Lomax and three other disaffected Northampton Town fans gathered for a post-match grumble about the state of their club under a chairman they bitterly resented. Lomax conceived a plan to form an association of fans who would pay into a fund to help the club, but not part with any money except in return for shares.

"Throughout football history, fans have given themselves, and money, to the clubs, but ownership has stayed with a few directors who too often ran it in their own interests," Lomax explained. He became the first elected director of the Northampton Town trust, and served on the club's board for seven years.

In the late 1990s, the campaigning United fans, and those of other clubs disaffected by their directors making fortunes while imposing wicked price increases on the supporters, came together with Lomax to call for fan ownership of clubs. The Labour government recognised this as a progressive argument and agreed to set up Supporters Direct. This organisation, which Lomax now chairs, aims to help fans set up trusts, build a stake in their clubs and have a say in the running of them.

It would be fair to say that before the 1990s, the majority of fans did not think about such things as the corporate structure of their clubs – most were probably unaware that they even were companies, owned by shareholders. But the sudden attack on what felt like the communal soul of the game – cheap entry, terraces, directors who didn't make big money out of the clubs – led many fans on journeys to discover what had led to this.

The clubs, they learned, were mostly started in the 1880s by groups of friends interested only in playing the game. The Church was instrumental in encouraging them, because of the benefits it believed sport could bring to inner-city lads. The clubs became companies after the FA sanctioned professionalism in 1885, and the Football League was formed three years later. The intention was to protect the clubs' founders from personal liability for the expenses, and also to raise new money to help build grounds. Fans flocked to the grounds and claimed the clubs as "theirs", loyalty pledged for life, although the "clubs" were in fact companies by then, and the chairmen, invariably local businessmen, were usually also the major shareholders, having bought up the shares in a financial crisis or boardroom coup.

The history of the game supports the gut instinct of many fans that these men were supposed to remain true to their own descriptions of themselves as "custodians" of the clubs, and not make money out of them. The FA imposed rules on the clubs' constitutions that prevented directors being paid salaries and limited shareholders' dividends. They were to serve the clubs, the governing body insisted, not line their bank accounts with "revenues".

In the 1990s, when Manchester United, Aston Villa, Newcastle and others floated on the stock market, they bypassed those long-standing rules. The shareholders looked to make fortunes, and the FA said nothing. This current bout of takeovers is delivering that bounty, the pay-off to a generation never much loved – Moores, perhaps, apart.

Investor...Magnusson

> "There is little suspicion of the new owners for the money they intend to make"

Yet, except for that Manchester United campaign, fans have not protested about any of this. Liverpool fans generally feel that they need the new stadium or will fall terminally behind, that Moores truly loved the club, and that Hicks and Gillett have made the right noises so far about not ripping them off. Many Villa fans had resented Ellis for all his time in charge and the Holte End has resounded to approving chants of "USA! USA!" since Lerner arrived with plans and a much higher class of PR.

West Ham fans sang their funny song to Magnusson, the former owner of a cookie-making company: "If you made a lot of money out of biscuits, buy our club." Many seem to resent the money Brown has made, but welcome the Icelanders' investment. Around the English game, there is little suspicion of the new owners for the money they intend to make.

The American invasion may seem an astonishing development, especially to other European football cultures whose clubs are still intact, as supporter-owned institutions. In England, though, the fans are not revolting. Now it is like following an industry in the *Financial Times*, with straightforward reports of clubs' accounts, the discussion concerned only with which club will be next. ●

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Taking a stand...Manchester United supporters protest against the Glazers' proposed takeover in May 2005

THE ALTERNATIVES

The different models of club ownership across Europe

1 The members club

Barcelona and Real Madrid are the most famous examples of clubs owned by their fans – the *socios* – who elect a new president every four years. Athletic Bilbao and Osasuna are the only other member clubs in La Liga.

In Germany, Schalke are run on a similar basis, though there are concerns that the recent £67million sponsorship deal with Russian company Gazprom is a foreign takeover by the backdoor. Leverkusen have remained a members club despite close links with the Bayer pharmaceutical giant.

2 Germany's amateur-professional split

Many Bundesliga clubs are split between an amateur side, where the members still vote for the president, and the professional side, which runs the financial and marketing side. Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer was elected by club members but his role is largely symbolic. Vice-president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge runs the professional side of the club. At least 51 per cent of Bayern remains in the hands of the members, but external investment in permitted. Adidas, for example, has a 10 per cent stake.

3 The French amateur sports club

Many clubs in France, including Auxerre, Lille and Nantes, are known as SAOS (Societe Anonyme a Objet Sportif), or private sports clubs, and receive subsidies from local and municipal authorities. In recent years, some clubs, such as Toulouse, have turned from SAOS status to SASP (Societe Anonyme Sportive Professionnelle), or professional sports clubs. With these, profit dividends can be paid out, and external investment is allowed of up to a third of the club.

4 The listed company

Lyon plan to become the first French club to float on the stock exchange after a change in the country's law lifted restrictions on football clubs listing. Lyon hope to generate around £55million from the initiative, part of which they plan to use to build a new stadium.

"Fan-club" presidents...Barca's Joan Laporta and Real Madrid's Ramon Calderon

Power play...Bayern Munich vice-president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and president Franz Beckenbauer

Prize day...Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas has his sights set on a lucrative stock exchange listing

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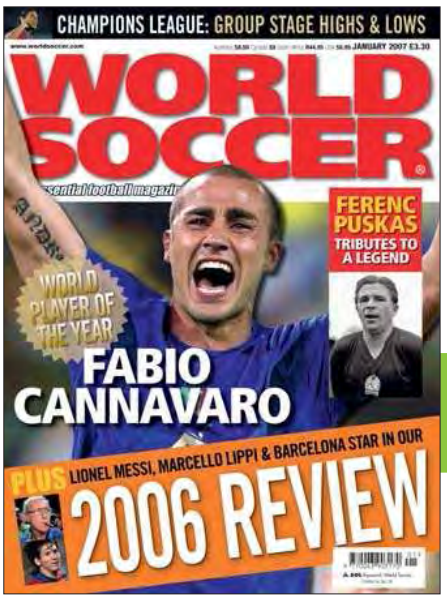

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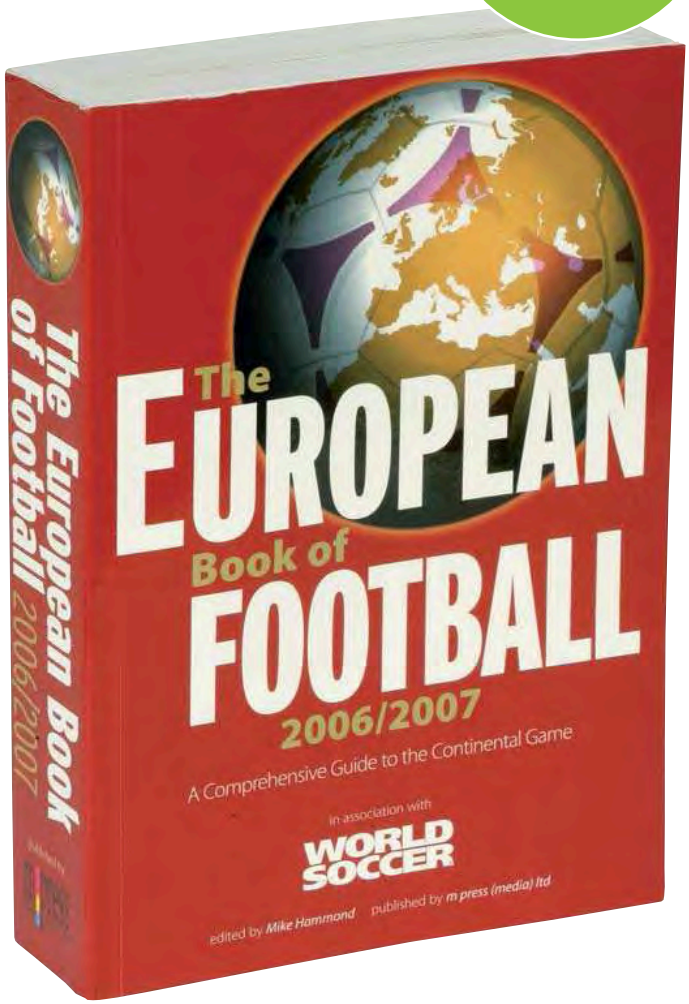

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David SILVA

SPAIN

Canary Islander on song for Valencia

YOUNG VALENCIA midfielder David Silva has gone from strength to strength, establishing himself as one of La Liga's brightest stars of 2006-07 and getting a call-up to the senior national team.

The 21-year-old, born in the Canary Islands but with Valencia from the age of 13, is dynamic and hard-working, has quick feet, is precise and imaginative in his passing, and poses a menace with his long-range shooting. The latter attribute was perfectly illustrated by his volleyed goal in Valencia's 2-2 Champions League draw with Internazionale in Milan.

Although coach Quique Flores usually uses Silva on the left of midfield, the player also has experience as a central midfield strategist and even as a right-winger.

The youngster has football in the family. His father played at a local level in Gran Canaria alongside Juan Carlos Valeron, who has since found success in the professional game. The Deportivo La Coruna and Spain stalwart, currently battling a potentially career-threatening knee injury, actually coached Silva junior, and the lessons have clearly paid off.

Silva's rise to the top has been well signposted for a number of years, though Real Madrid will not want to be reminded that they had the option to sign him but were not convinced and pulled out.

Silva first came to prominence at the 2003 World Under-17 Championship in Finland. South Korea were 2-0 up, but Silva hit a rapid hat-trick as a substitute to ensure Spain stayed on course for the latter stages. A European title with the Under-19s the following year proved Silva was still on the right road. He spent the 2004-05 season on loan at lower division Eibar, and last term at Celta Vigo. Then came the recall to Valencia, and the ball just kept rolling for him as he won his first senior Spain cap against Romania last November.

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

Club Valencia
Country Spain
Born January 8, 1986, in Arguineguin
Previous clubs Eibar (loan), Celta Vigo (loan)
International debut November 2006, v Romania
International caps 4 (0 goals)
Honours European Under-19 Championship 2004

Demy DE ZEEUW

HOLLAND

AZ midfielder preferring club to country

AZ ALKMAAR defensive midfielder Demy De Zeeuw is the epitome of low-key efficiency. He is rarely caught out of position, tactically aware, fierce in the tackle, an accurate passer and tireless as he patrols in front of the back-line.

But although the 23-year-old, a former centre-back, gives the impression of substance over style, he is not without his creative side, specialising in producing perfectly-weighted killer balls inside the full-back for an onrushing winger.

If only De Zeeuw, who joined AZ from Go Ahead Eagles in 2005, kept things as simple off the pitch. He certainly would not have endeared himself to Holland boss Marco Van Basten after voicing his unhappiness recently on being included in the national squad and then spending the 90 minutes in the stand. He even hinted that he might decline another invitation.

"I didn't like the vibe in the national team," declared De Zeeuw, a member of the Under-21 side that won the European title last summer. "At this point, AZ are much more important to me than the *Oranje,* and more fun too."

Louis Van Gaal, his coach at AZ, was certainly not impressed, saying: "That was not a smart thing to do."

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

Club AZ Alkmaar
Country Holland
Born May 26, 1983, in Apeldoorn
Previous clubs AGOVV, Go Ahead Eagles
Honours European Under-21 Championship 2006

Sotiris NINIS

GREECE

Teenager dubbed the "Hellenic Leo Messi"

TEENAGE Panathinaikos winger Sotiris Ninis is the name on everyone's lips in Greece at the moment and has been dubbed the Hellenic answer to Lionel Messi.

Not without reason. Since making his debut for the Athens club in early January, the 17-year-old has been sensational, showing his ability to slalom effortlessly around defenders, deliver telling crosses and score spectacular goals.

Three weeks after his first-team debut, the apparently nerveless Ninis hit his first goal, in a 2-0 win over Panionios. Cutting in from the flank, he beat one defender, rode another challenge and coolly stroked the ball home. He was also on the scoresheet, this time from long range, in the 4-1 derby defeat of AEK in February, when he also provided two assists.

"Ability and a mature outlook take precedence over a birth certificate," said Panathinaikos' coach Victor Munoz.

Ninis holds dual nationality since he hails from Northern Epirus, a Greek-speaking enclave in Albania. But he has already turned down the chance to play for the latter's Under-21s, and the moment when he dons the blue and white of Greece is surely just around the corner.

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

Club Panathinaikos
Country Greece
Born April 3, 1990, in Himara, Albania
Previous club Apollon

SIX TO WATCH

Nick Bidwell selects the French League's most promising young Africans

SEDAN

Nadir Belhadj

The 24-year-old Algeria left-back or left-sided midfielder has looked to the manner born in his first season in France. As a consequence, he had half the clubs in Ligue 1 plus PSV Eindhoven and Ajax drooling over him during the January transfer window. Belhadj finally decided to join Lyon next summer in a £2.3million deal. Lens, who once had the player on their books, are still kicking themselves for failing to spot his potential.

TOULOUSE

Achille Emana

The Cameroonian attacking midfielder has been one of the main forces of a Toulouse side that has punched way above its weight this term. Comfortable in the hole or on the right side, Emana offers goals, creativity and explosive movement in equal measure. For the past couple of years he has regularly made wantaway noises, and with Lyon, Arsenal and Marseille all said to be interested, he should soon have his wish.

SAINT-ETIENNE

Bafetimbi Gomis

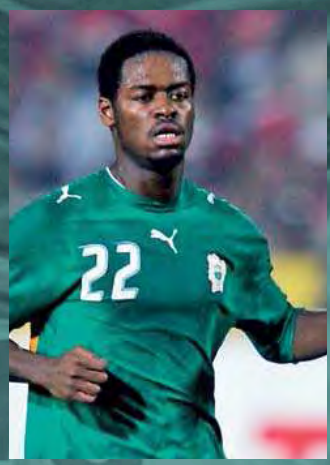
The 21-year-old forward, born in the Var region of southern France to Senegalese parents, has not looked back since scoring twice in his first league start against Toulouse last November. Gomis, a product of the Saint-Etienne academy, is quick, powerful and in his element running on to through balls. English club Wimbledon once tried and failed to take Gomis home with them after falling victim to one of his spectacular goals in a youth tournament.

LENS

Adil Hermach

Promising youngster at his most effective as a defensive midfielder but who can also operate in central defence or at full-back. Although born in France and invited to play for the country's national youth teams on several occasions, Hermach insisted his international future lay with Morocco, his parents' homeland. His tactically disciplined and fearless performances in the UEFA Cup recently earned him a two-year contract extension with Lens.

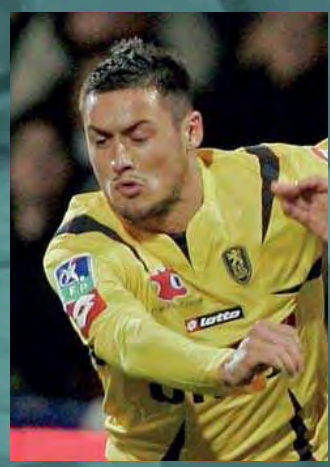
LE MANS



Romaric N'Dri

The Ivory Coast midfielder used to be in his element pushing forward for Le Mans. But at the start of the season coach Frederic Hantz had the brainwave of switching him to a holding role in front of the defence, a position where his energy, good technique and intelligent distribution have come into their own. He needs better luck when it comes to car travel, however. In 2005, N'Dri broke a shoulder in a road accident, and last year was a passenger in a vehicle caught speeding at more than 200kph (125mph).

SOCHAUX



Karim Ziani

Brilliant little Algerian midfielder whose mesmeric dribbling skills and inventiveness can be employed on either flank or through the middle. He is also a composed finisher and free-kick virtuoso. Ziani began his career in the youth ranks of Racing Paris, moving on to Troyes and then Lorient, where he spearheaded their run to promotion to the top flight last season. But instead of staying with them, he opted to join Sochaux.

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Dark side of the boom

A massive match-fixing scandal has overshadowed the revival in fortunes of the national side

IN POLISH LAW, he can be identified only by his first name and the initial of his surname. But the fact is that Ryszard F was, for many years, the most powerful figure in Polish football.

To those involved in his network, Ryszard F was known as The Barber – a reference to the barber's shop he ran in the small western town of Wronki.

The Barber's association with football began in 1992 when he persuaded the owners of Amica, a local kitchen equipment manufacturer, to support the merger of two lower-division clubs. The Barber became manager of the new entity, Amica Wronki, where he "took care" of referees and supervised the club's rise through the divisions to the top flight.

In 1998 they won their first trophy, beating second division Aluminium Konin 5-3 in the Cup Final, but received what appeared to be some very "friendly" refereeing decisions.

Such seemingly favourable treatment had made the club the most unpopular in the country. The owners realised they had to do something to improve their image, so they sacked The Barber. But he was a major figure in the corruption network he had created, with important connections to referees and football officials. Clubs throughout the League relied on his help, whether competing for the title or battling against relegation.

> "Dziurowicz said he could no longer operate in a system built on corruption and hypocrisy"

But while The Barber's involvement was undoubted, the real question was, who was going to break the system?

The answer came in 2005, when Piotr Dziurowicz, owner of GKS Katowice, decided to collaborate with the police. The 29-year-old, the youngest chairman in the Polish game, had inherited the club from his father, Marian, on his death three years earlier.

The latter, nicknamed The Magnate, had been president of both Katowice and the Polish FA. He had taught his son, a law student, all he knew about fixing games. But although Piotr subsequently admitted "buying" several matches, he said he could no longer operate in a system built on corruption and hypocrisy. He approached the police and agreed to collaborate in a sting operation that led to the arrest of referee Antoni F, who had accepted £16,500 to fix two league matches, and FA refereeing committee official Marian D, for collusion.

Information from suspects led to more arrests. By the time we went to press, 71 people, including players, had been arrested and charged. Among them was The Barber, who has been in custody since June 2006 and has been described as "the leader of an organised criminal group".

Names revealed

Dziurowicz had given an astonishing newspaper interview, in which he revealed the names of people involved in corruption and declared "bribes for players and referees are normal in Polish football". He said he had agreed to speak out because "I wanted to finish a certain stage in my life and start a new one without bad things from the past".

The scandal has had a major impact on the Polish game, not least the FA, the PZPN. In January, Wit Zelazko, an FA executive committee member responsible for referees, was detained by the match-fixing investigators. In response, Poland's sports minister, Tomasz Lipiec, suspended FA chairman Michal Listkiewicz and his executive committee and appointed a temporary commissioner, Andrzej Rusko, though the latter quit after just two weeks.

FIFA and UEFA, who take a dim view of political interference in the affairs of national associations, said in a joint statement that "the PZPN executive committee remains the only recognised body" – suggesting that if the situation did not change, they would punish Poland by kicking their teams out of international competition.

It took the intervention of state president Lech Kaczynski and FIFA president Sepp Blatter to prevent this scenario. During a meeting in Warsaw, they established a special commission, made up of UEFA, FIFA and Polish government representatives, to prepare a new election for FA chairman and executive committee, probably in June. Meanwhile, Lipiec reinstated Listkiewicz and his committee.

This was a triumph for the chairman, whose job had been under threat following Dziurowicz's accusations and again, in January, when criticised by Lipiec. Now, his position was strengthened.

Listkiewicz will receive a further boost should Poland win the hosting rights for Euro 2012. Their joint bid with Ukraine is on a shortlist of three, along with Italy and Croatia/Hungary, with the winner to be announced on April 18.

The chairman has backed the bid strongly from the start, despite negative public opinion and Poland's lack of a single stadium that complies with UEFA criteria. "It was the same with Portugal before Euro 2004," Listkiewicz said. "We will build them all. This tournament is a great chance for our football and economy."

The chairman is also reaping the rewards of appointing Dutchman Leo Beenhakker as national coach following the grim World Cup group stage exit under Pawel Janas.

At the time, Listkiewicz said: "Beenhakker will bring a new quality to Polish football and lead us to the European Championship finals for the first time."

These words seemed wildly optimistic after a 3-1 home defeat by Finland in the Poles' first Euro 2008 qualifier last

DARIUSZ KUROWSKI in Warsaw

Passing through...Maciej Zurawski tries to thread the ball to Jakub Blaszczykowski during the 1-0 win over Belgium

September. But Beenhakker was not about to give up, saying: "I have spent 40 years in this business and I know that Poles can play well. They just need more self-confidence. Give me more time and they will win, I am sure."

A month later Poland beat Portugal 2-1 with a performance that was described as their "best for a decade". In November, they recorded another important victory, 1-0 away to Belgium, to go to within a point of the Finns at the head of the group. Just as importantly, the Poles have been showing impressive style and much more self-belief.

After the Portugal game, Beenhakker told Legia Warsaw defender Grzegorz Bronowicki, one of the team's new recruits: "You are now 'Big Brono', do you understand?", having seen him effectively mark Cristiano Ronaldo.

Beenhakker has made regulars of a number of other home-based players, including defender Michal Golanski (Korona Kielce), midfielder Jakub Blaszczykowski (Wisla Krakow) and striker Radoslaw Matusiak (GKS Belchatow, sold to Palermo in January). Against Belgium, the starting XI included six home-based players and five "foreigners".

More competitive

In the League, games seem to be more interesting and competitive, but while this could partly be because of Beenhakker's influence, it could also suggest there is a different mentality following the campaign against match-fixing.

In the past six seasons only two teams have won the title: Wisla (four) and Legia (two). However, this term is too hard to call. Although Legia, the defending champions, and Wisla, last season's runners-up, are still in the running, they have strong competition. Surprise leaders GKS Belchatow confirmed their title credentials at the start of the spring programme when hammering Gornik Leczna 6-0 and Widzew Lodz 3-0. Two other rising powers, Korona Kielce and Zaglebie Lubin, are also both still in the race.

Yet the scandal will not go away. After studying the prosecutors' documents, the FA disciplinary commission recently declared clubs involved will face serious punishment at the end of the season.

Top division Arka Gdynia, accused of fixing 13 games during their 2004-05 promotion season, have been suspended for a month and could be thrown out of the League altogether.

High-flying second division club Zawisza Bydgoszcz, whose chairman, Wojciech K, is one of the arrested, decided to anticipate the FA's decision and withdrew from the League. Their last coach, Boguslaw Baniak, has been described as a very good friend of The Barber.

Finally, it seems, we are seeing the dismantling of his network.

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Arka, Korona, Lech...a guide to the top division teams

1 POGON SZCZECIN

Owner Antoni Ptak has packed the side with Brazilians from his academy near Sao Paulo but fans have not taken to the policy: they voted with their feet after Pogon lost 2-0 at GKS Belchatow without a single Pole in the starting line-up.

2 ARKA GDYNIA

Well-supported team but have only one trophy to their name – the 1979 Polish Cup. Returned to the top flight in 2005 after a 23-year absence. One of the clubs facing demotion as a result of the match-fixing scandal; recently suspended for a month.

3 GROCLIN DYSKOBOLIA

From the small town of Grodzisk Wielkopolski, which has a population of only 12,000. Owned by Zbigniew Drzymala, the man behind Inter Groclin Auto, a local car seat and upholstery manufacturer. Cup winners in 2005.

4 LECH POZNAN

The former railway club are five-time champions but have been in serious financial trouble for years. Their merger with Amica Wronki in 2006 saved them from bankruptcy. However, there are plans to rebuild the stadium to give it a 45,000 capacity, which would make it the biggest club ground in the country.

5 ZAGLEBIE LUBIN

Lubin is a small town but the club are ambitious and have the League's biggest budget – £5.25million a season – thanks to the backing of copper giants KGHM. Won the championship in 1991.

6 WISLA PLOCK

Won the Cup last season and the Super Cup at the start of this campaign. But they face an uncertain future after petrol giant Orlen withdrew its sponsorship.

7 LKS LODZ

Champions in 1998 but that was also when their financial troubles began. Relegation followed two years later and they were almost declared bankrupt. Returned to the top division last season but with one of the lowest budgets, £1.3m.

8 WIDZEW LODZ

One of the country's leading sides in the 1980s and 1990s, when they won four league titles and the Cup. They also played in the Champions League in 1996-97, the last Polish club to do so. But they now have huge financial problems and had to rely on former star Zbigniew Boniek, an influential figure within the FA, to help them obtain a league licence.

9 GKS BELCHATOW

The two-times cup runners-up (1996 and 1999) were the surprise leaders at the halfway point of the season. Experienced coach Orest Lenczyk has put the team together on one of the League's lowest budgets, £1.4m. The club are backed financially by the local coal and thermal power station.

10 LEGIA WARSAW

Defending champions and the only team not to have been relegated since the Second World War. The former army club are now controlled by TV company ITI Group. Legia have the second highest budget (£4.4m) and are under pressure to spend it wisely from the noisy fans, who demand success. The club still have problems with hooliganism.

11 KORONA KIELCE

A new power in Polish football, thanks to the financial support of distribution company Kolporter, whose co-owner Krzysztof Klicki took control of the club in 2002. Korona, which means crown, were promoted to the top flight in 2005 and opened a new 15,550-capacity, purpose-built stadium last year.

12 GORNIK LECZNA

Small-town club who were founded in 1979 and are funded by a mining company (Gornik means miner). Promoted in 2003. Implicated in the corruption scandal and face likely demotion.

13 ODRA WODZISLAW

A modest, small-town club but a canny transfer policy, masterminded by coach-turned-chairman Edward Socha, has kept them ticking over.

14 GORNIK ZABRZE

The club, from the industrial region of Silesia, are the most successful in Poland having won 14 league titles and six Cups. They are also the only one to have played in a European final (1970 Cup-winners Cup, lost 2-1 to Manchester City). Gornik were the country's richest club in the 1980s thanks to the support of the mining industry, but the end of the Communist era brought financial troubles and they now have the lowest budget in the League, £880,000.

15 WISLA KRAKOW

The dominant team of the past decade, having won five league titles. Owner Boguslaw Cupial has invested heavily – the club's annual budget is £3.5m and the rebuilt stadium now holds 35,000. However, they have yet to reach the group stage of the Champions League – Cupial's holy grail.

16 CRACOVIA

The Krakow club were Poland's first champions in 1921. Among their many traditions is a New Year's Day game between the first XI and the reserves. Returned to the top flight in 2004 after 20 years following a cash injection from computer company Comarch. Counted the late Pope John Paul II as a fan, but also have a notorious hooligan element.

The movers and shakers in Polish football

● BOGUSLAW CUPIAL
The controversial owner of Wisla Krakow and cable company Tele-Fonika Kable, he is one of Poland's richest men, with an estimated wealth of £350m. Since taking control of Wisla in December 1997 they have won five league titles and two Cups, but Cupial has sacked 18 coaches.

● JERZY ENGEL
Head of the FA's technical department since last year. Coached Poland to the 2002 World Cup, their first finals for 16 years, and later led Legia Warsaw, Polonia Warsaw and Wisla Krakow, but without success.

● GRZEGORZ LATO
The former international is a member of the FA executive committee and a candidate to become FA chairman. Played for Poland in three World Cups and was tournament top scorer in 1974. Has since coached a number of Polish clubs and was a member of parliament from 2001 to 2005.

● MICHAL LISTKIEWICZ
A former referee, linesman and sports journalist who has been FA chairman since 1999. Refused to step down despite facing huge criticism about the country's match-fixing scandal. Subsequently declared that he would not stand in the forthcoming election, but then unexpectedly changed his mind. Well connected in international football and nicknamed "minister of foreign affairs" by the media. Close to FIFA president Sepp Blatter (also pictured). Was a linesman in the 1990 World Cup Final.

● ANDRZEJ RUSKO
In January he was appointed by sports minister Tomasz Lipiec as a temporary commissioner to run Polish football in place of the suspended FA executive, only to resign two weeks later. Rusko, a representative of the richer clubs who want more power within the FA, is a strong candidate to be the next FA chairman. A former manager in speedway.

● ANTONI PTAK
Businessman who invested heavily in football in the 1990s, buying LKS Lodz and leading them to the title in 1998, then transferred his allegiance to Pogon Szczecin. Owns a football academy in Brazil near Sao Paulo, which is managed by his son Dawid. A steady supply of Brazilian players has arrived at Pogon, but they have brought little improvement and Ptak recently put the club up for sale.

● LEO BEENHAKKER
Highly experienced Dutch coach who is in charge of the Polish national team for the Euro 2008 campaign. Has been criticised by some club coaches for trying to impose his football philosophy on domestic football, but his influence on Poland's style has been noticeable, and he is fast earning people's respect.

● ZBIGNIEW BONIEK
The former international is a close friend of UEFA president Michel Platini (also pictured), having played alongside him at Juventus. Currently, he has no official role in football, but he remains a hugely influential personality. "I could be the new FA chairman, but I don't want to be," he declared recently.

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

League clash...Wisla Krakow v Legia Warsaw

● The League was formed in 1927 (from 1921 to 1926 the championship operated on a cup system). In 2005, it was named Orange Ekstraklasa after its mobile company sponsor.

● The season runs from July to June, with a long break from November to March.

● The Polish Cup, for all FA member clubs, was first contested in 1926, but then disappeared after just that one season and came back only in 1951.

● The League Cup, for top division teams only, returned to the calendar this season after a five-year break. The knockout stages are scheduled for late May and June, with the group stage having been played at the start and end of the League's winter break. The League Cup was first contested in 1977, for just one season, then again from 1999 until 2002.

Power and

Internazionale bribed referees on their way to European Cup glory in the 1960s but Helenio Herrera's side could well have been good enough to win the trophy honestly. By Brian Glanville

IN THE 1960s, Internazionale won the European Cup twice, lost in the Final once, and were defeated once in a semi-final. Whether they would have won at all had they not been under the malign aegis of president Angelo Moratti, secretary Italo Allodi and Hungarian refugee "fixer" Dezso Solti must be for ever doubtful. Yet there can be no denying that Helenio

Action stations...Inter's Guarneri attempts to clear from Puskas of Real Madrid during the 1964 European Cup Final

corruption

Herrera, the flamboyant, greedy, ruthless, authoritarian coach, built an excellent team that could surely have done well without the outrageous corruption of referees.

Two images dwell in the mind. Of Tommy Smith, the rugged Liverpool defender, literally kicking Spanish referee Ortiz de Mendibil off the field at San Siro after his side had had two goals scandalously awarded against them as Inter won 3-0 in the European Cup semi-final second leg in 1965. And, after Inter had lost to Celtic in Lisbon in the 1967 Final, of two of the Celtic training staff standing over Herrera and abusing him. "Who told them to?" I once asked Bill Shankly, the irrepressible manager of the Liverpool team beaten at San Siro. "I did," was the reply.

> "Herrera, the flamboyant, greedy, ruthless, authoritarian coach, built an excellent team"

United in victory...Herrera and his players enjoy European success in 1964

Gerry Hitchens, England's centre-forward of the early Sixties, said it was "like coming out of the bloody army" when, in November 1962, Inter suddenly transferred him to Torino. The move came despite Hitchens having scored no fewer than 16 goals in the previous season and after Herrera had assured me that the player would be staying when I had rung him to enquire. I had needed to know because Hitchens was just about to star in a TV documentary with which I was involved.

Hitchens, a former miner from Shropshire, had become sick of Herrera's iron regime, his perpetual hectoring. Of the notices up in the dressing room: "ATTACK: MORE THAN 100 GOALS! DEFENCE: LESS THAN 30 GOALS!" Of Herrera's mantra on the morning after an away match in Europe as the coach took the sleepy team to the airport: "Think of the game! Think of the next game!"

Once, when Hitchens and two other leading players had been left some way behind during a run, Herrera went off in the team coach without them, leaving them to walk the six miles back to base.

Fancy meeting you!... Gerry Hitchens (left) greets fellow Englishman Jimmy Greaves of Milan before a derby game

Herrera, brought up in the slums of Casablanca, though born in Argentina, had had a solid career as a defender in French football. He also began his coaching career in France, then moved on to Spain. There, eventually, he took over Barcelona, with whom he won two league titles, the Spanish Cup and a Fairs Cup.

Dazzling football

At that time Barcelona had a galaxy of polyglot talent – South Americans such as Evaristo and Eulogio Martinez, and members of the great Hungarian side of the 1950s in Sandor Kocsis and Zoltan Czibor. This was a team capable of dazzling football, and they shattered the long-ball myth of Wolverhampton under Stanley Cullis, thrashing them home and away in the 1959-60 European Cup quarter-finals.

But when Barcelona lost to their eternal foes, Real Madrid, in the semi-finals that season, the fans turned viciously on Herrera and he was off to manage Inter.

There, his approach radically changed: caution became the watchword, catenaccio the reality, breakaway the style. Inter, it is true, had been playing a form of catenaccio since the early 1950s but never as rigorously as this. Bafflingly, Herrera justified his volte-face by insisting that he needed such tactics to combat less gifted teams in the Italian League, though he did not in fact win his first Serie A title until 1963.

He had taken Luis Suarez, one of his Barcelona stars, to orchestrate Inter's midfield, and replaced Hitchens with fleet Brazilian right-winger Jair. Armando Picchi was sweeper and skipper, rigidly defensive, endlessly combative.

> **"In the 1963-64 European Cup, Allodi and Solti got down to their skulduggery when it came to the semi-final against Borussia Dortmund"**

Towering left-back Giacinto Facchetti prided himself on his attacking incursions and his ability to score goals; Mario Corso was a clever, deep-lying outside-left; Sandro Mazzola the elegant, versatile centre-forward.

Everton put up strong resistance in the first round of the 1963-64 European Cup, drawing 0-0 at Goodison and losing only 1-0 at San Siro. But Inter's next opponents, Monaco and Partizan Belgrade, were dispatched with scant trouble.

Allodi and Solti got down to their skulduggery when it came to the semi-final against Borussia Dortmund. The first leg, in Germany, was a 2-2 draw, and Solti successfully bribed Tesanic, the Yugoslav referee of the return. The irony was that Inter would surely have been quite capable of winning even without the help of Tesanic, who did not send off Suarez for kicking a Borussia player so badly that he could not continue. There were no substitutes in those days, and Inter won 2-0.

In the Final they deservedly beat Real Madrid 3-1, Mazzola scoring two of the goals. That summer Tesanic told a fellow Yugoslav holidaymaker that Inter had paid for his seaside vacation.

Inter failed to win the Italian League in 1963-64. Bologna, under the aegis of that gifted player and now coach Fulvio Bernardini, were well on course to win the title when traces of

THE WAY WE WORE... Inter's kits down the years

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5

drugs were seemingly discovered in flasks of tested urine. The club were found guilty and had points deducted. But on appeal it was found the urine had been doctored, the points were restored, and to their great moral credit, Bologna found the force to keep competing. They finished level on points with Inter and beat them 2-0 in a play-off.

The following season, Inter were back on top in Serie A, pipping Milan by three points. And in the European Cup they scandalously got the better of Liverpool after losing 3-1 at Anfield in the first leg of the semi-final. In the return, referee De Mendibil gifted Inter two goals – one scored direct from a free-kick that was meant to be indirect, the other after Spaniard Joaquin Peiro had kicked the ball out of the hands of keeper Tommy Lawrence.

The following season, however, when it came to the semi-final second leg against Real Madrid, with Inter 1-0 down from the opening tie, Solti, Allodi and Moratti at last encountered a referee they couldn't bribe, brave Hungarian Gyorgy Vadas. In vain for Moratti to offer him and his linesmen the treasures of this world; in vain for Solti to erupt into Vadas' dressing room at half-time to abuse him. The game was drawn, 1-1, and Inter were out.

In 1967, Inter reached the Final again, having beaten Real Madrid home and away in the semis.

Mazzola put them ahead against Celtic with a penalty but their gallant, dashing, almost all-Glaswegian opponents eventually swept them aside with goals by Tommy Gemmell and Steve Chalmers. It was revenge of a kind for Shankly. ●

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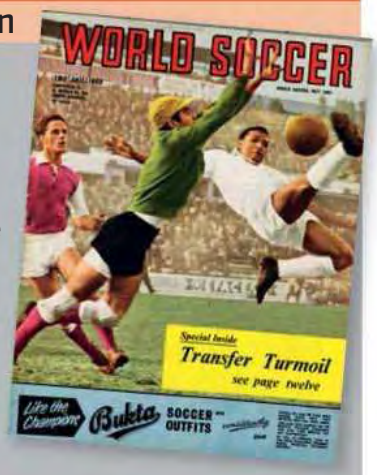
FROM THE ARCHIVES

Herrera was making a big impression

MAY 1961



FROM Barcelona, Herrera went to Milan, where, within a few days of his dismissal, he signed a contract with Internazionale. After seeing his new club play, Herrera took the first step in his programme designed to gain the confidence of his new club. He called a press conference and there informed everyone that Inter would win the Italian championship in the new season. Already they have the necessary players. No new men will be needed, it is simply a question of their training. He will put this right.

The club have already been sufficiently impressed to offer him a new contract.

Herrera's methods are not at all complicated. Given first-class players, he seeks first to establish peak condition, physical and mental. He instils in his players supreme confidence. He fills them with his own confidence. Then he selects the best team bearing in mind the circumstances.

They call him the world's top boss

He never asks a player to perform in a manner which is beyond his capabilities...His key men, the "thinkers", dictate the play the way he wants it to go. Everybody else plays naturally.

Herrera's record means he is constantly in demand, he receives offers almost every day, and even Real Madrid are said to be after him. The Spanish FA would also like him to devote himself full time to their national side, for during the brief period that he was in charge, Spain played with far greater success than they had ever done before.

Certainly we shall hear much more of HH in the future, but he can hardly be more successful than he was with Barcelona.

1 Giacinto Facchetti, 1960s
2 Sandro Mazzola, 1970s
3 Lothar Matthaus, 1989
4 Dennis Bergkamp, 1993
5 Roberto Carlos, 1996
6 Ronaldo, 1998
7 Ivan Zamorano, 1999
8 Christian Vieri, 2003
9 Adriano, 2007

Best of three?

Italy still lead the race to host Euro 2012, whatever Blatter says

OFFICIALLY, UEFA's honorary president is Lennart Johansson. He was projected upstairs by acclamation at the behest of successor Michel Platini at congress in Dusseldorf. But the real holder of that role is Sepp Blatter, the FIFA president, who was Platini's No 1 cheerleader in the run-up to the UEFA election.

Blatter has never been slow with an opinion and, as far as European football affairs are concerned, he now clearly feels freer than ever to let his voice be heard.

I do not think this is bad news. A large phalanx of journalists whinge and gripe about Blatter's propensity for speaking out – whether making sense or making mischief. I wish most other football officials and players were as free with their views.

This is football, after all, not state security (though Blatter is hardly Mr Transparency when it comes to the inner workings of FIFA's political and financial mechanisms).

Blatter does talk his way into trouble, of course. He was quoted in Australia as talking up the Socceroos' effort against Italy at the World Cup, which led to howls of fury in Italy, forcing him to backtrack hastily.

Similarly, he has stepped into the Euro 2012 bidding race, apparently talking up Ukraine's potential to co-host, with Poland, to the detriment, once more, of the poor

Presidential address...Michel Platini's executive will reach its decision about the Euro 2012 hosts on April 18 but Blatter has already stuck his oar in

Italians. Cue more howls of fury from Italy, and cue Blatter again backtracking in haste.

Misquoted – again! So often it happens. Just how unfortunate can you be, to be misquoted from one end of the world to another. It only goes to show how tough is the life of a FIFA president!

Blatter has also, of course, reacted favourably to the prospect of England bidding to host the 2018 World Cup (when he was in London); but he also reacted favourably to the prospect of Australia or the United States bidding (because FIFA's set-piece, high-profile, new HQ-opening congress is just around the corner and he wants to keep the wider world onside for his own particular purposes).

Before then, on April 17 in Cardiff, UEFA's executive will view the Euro 2012 candidates' presentations and then decide the next day on the identity of the winner.

It's a bidding contest that has been more affected by politics than any since England won the rights to Euro 96 despite the hooligan shadow and largely because of its ability to host an enlarged, 16-team finals.

The shortlist of three is: Ukraine/Poland, Croatia/Hungary and Italy. Greece and Turkey were eliminated after the first round of voting in 2005, while Azerbaijan, Romania and Russia all failed to follow through with initial expressions of interest.

The winner should have been decided before Christmas. However, Johansson, knowing that every vote was vital in the forthcoming presidential election, postponed the vote for fear that he would catch negative fall-out from all the losers.

Huge embarrassment

The Italians have always been the favourites, despite their corruption-riddled domestic game. The *Calciopoli* match-fixing scandal was a huge embarrassment, but the Italians are confident that it will not adversely affect their poll in the Euro 2012 vote, the theory being that memories of last summer's debacle will have faded sufficiently.

Italy's bid was no doubt boosted by Poland's troubles – in mid-January sports minister Tomasz Lipiec suspended the federation executive, including chairman Michal Listkiewicz, for failing to get to grips with domestic match-fixing. The Ukrainians, their bid partners, were aghast. They knew they were outsiders and, however nonsensical, saw FIFA's subsequent suspension threat to the Poles as a Zurich-inspired move to back Italy's candidacy.

Unfortunately for Italy, calcio was plunged back into chaos at the start of February. The death of a policeman in rioting at the Sicilian derby between Catania and Palermo exposed the administration of Italian football – not to say of Italian sport and domestic security – as incoherent if not neglectfully, some would say criminally, incompetent.

Remember the promise of Luca Pancalli, the Italian federation's emergency commissioner, to suspend league football indefinitely until solutions had been found? Remember how that suspension lasted a mere nine days? Why, do you think?

Simple – firstly, the clubs could not withstand the financial losses and, secondly, the federation needed the game back up and running as soon as possible so as not to further damage its image ahead of the vote for 2012.

Some have even used the enforced introduction of ramped-up stadium security as a plus factor. Gianni Rivera, former Milan captain and MP, said: "At least now everyone can see we are taking serious steps to upgrade our stadiums and our security systems. That has to be a positive factor for UEFA."

Also, Italy has the potential to stage an expanded 24-team event, if that is what UEFA decides it wants. The 16-team proposal is based on existing stadiums in Bari, Florence, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Rome and Udine plus the down-sized, redeveloped Delle Alpi in Turin. Stadiums at Bologna, Cagliari, Genoa and Verona can be added for the 24-team option.

The Italians also believe the election of Platini as UEFA president to be a plus factor: his family background is Italian and the peak of his career was played out with Juventus. He has enormous sympathy for Italian football and, of course, he is no longer counting possible votes. Thus all seems set fair for Italy, after 1968 and 1980, to play Euro hosts once more.

Oh...as long as it's OK with Uncle Sepp, of course. ●

> **"The Italian federation needed its game back up and running quickly so as not to further damage its image ahead of the vote"**

Just the ticket...incentive to Charlton fans

Fans for free

Charlton Athletic are promising that, if they are relegated this season, they will admit season-ticket holders for free in 2008-09...if those fans buy their tickets for next season before April 30. Simultaneously, an Italian commission of inquiry into the state of calcio has suggested that under-14s be admitted free to league games. It is all reminiscent of the day Silvio Berlusconi told me, more than a decade ago, that one day fans would all be let in for free because television would need them to provide atmosphere.

Changes roll on at UEFA

UEFA president Michel Platini has made another strategic move within his organisation. After appointing Scot David Taylor as general secretary, the replacement for the chief executive position last held by Lars-Christer Olsson, the Frenchman has brought in the affable William Gaillard as presidential adviser from his role as director of communications. It will be interesting to see who fills the communications gap. Will Platini look in-house or import one of his "FIFA family" friends?

Live? Well, not quite

I have a concern about BBC Radio Five Live that stems from the discovery, after hearing analogue and digital radios in different rooms simultaneously, that the digital sound comes through a fraction later than the discredited, dilapidated, anachronistic, prehistoric version of the signal. So, after the great digital switchover, will we be listening to Radio Five Not-Quite-As-Live? Absolutely!

Robot wars

Freddy Adu has laudably taken a stand against coaches taking the fun out of the game and simply ordering players about

IT IS MY opinion – and I share it with many others – that the great American whizzkid Freddy Adu may be in the process of becoming merely a good player, rather than the superstar we were promised.

Promised, did I say? Hell, we were bludgeoned into believing. Not least by people who really ought not to be part of the judgement process at all. Sponsors, for instance; in this case Nike, who were indecently quick to jump on the Adu bandwagon, giving him an endorsement deal worth £500,000 in 2003 when he was just 14.

Then there was the Major League Soccer hype. We were told at Adu's introductory press conference that he had turned down offers from Europe – from "all the top teams", said his agent Richard Motzkin – because he preferred to play in MLS. "Yes, I could have signed for a European team," Adu said.

Already the truth was being stretched. Under FIFA regulations, Adu, being under 18, could not move to a club in another country. He had no choice but MLS.

But if MLS could not flout FIFA regulations, it could certainly bend its own, which it proceeded to do, quite flagrantly. Adu should have entered the 2004 player draft, when he would have been snapped up by FC Dallas, who had the first pick.

But things were arranged so that the League "assigned" Adu to DC United, enabling the youngster to stay near his home in Washington.

At this point, Adu might well have expected, in his teenage wisdom, that he was going to get anything he asked for. But the one thing he wanted more than anything – plenty of playing time – he didn't get. Peter Novak, the DC coach, found he had a hot potato dumped in his lap, and simply didn't know what to do with it. He chose caution. Adu appeared in all 30 of DC's 2004 games, but usually as a second-half substitute.

Poor Novak, his was an impossible task. Overall, Adu's three years at DC were not particularly impressive. His stats – 11 goals and 17 assists – are decidedly unspectacular.

And spectacular was what Adu was supposed to be. In 2005 his frustration boiled over into a public criticism of Novak, which brought him a fine and suspension. At the end of the 2006 season, Adu was transferred to Real Salt Lake. Certainly not to be confused with Real Madrid, once mentioned as a likely destination for the boy.

The obvious questions: was Novak right to deem Adu not yet ready, or maybe not good enough, to get more playing time? Or was he guilty of holding back Adu's development? We'll never know. We shall see what happens this year with Real Salt Lake, where Adu is reunited with John Ellinger, who was his coach at the United States Soccer Federation's under-17 academy in Florida.

Dangerous assumption

Adu's progress – if that is what it is – so far is full of warnings about the dangers of assuming that exceptional talent at the age of 14 must mean future stardom. The verdict on Adu is still not in. But there is one area where – much to my surprise and delight – Adu has clearly triumphed. This suggests that he has some steely inner powers that may yet be so much more important than the contributions of his coaches.

Being groomed for stardom meant that Adu has been receiving advice in all sorts of off-the-field matters. Until his protest against lack of playing time, his totally innocuous and really rather boring comments to the media were beginning to sound like diplomatic press handouts.

They certainly contained no hint that this was a teenager speaking. But it seems that Adu has withstood all the attempts to turn him into a PR dream. His personality has not been hijacked, and we learned – at last – something of it when he recently spoke out on a vital matter of which he has considerable, if distorted, experience: youth development.

And what he had to say did certainly not come from any of his coaches: "In America, coaches take the fun out of the game for kids. They coach them to play one-touch, two-touch, and the kids aren't creative. It's no fun when you're not expressing yourself out on the field. I have to enjoy myself, I have to play with a smile on my face, I like to do moves, I like to take people on. I just like to express myself. I can't play one, two-touch every time because I'm not a robot and I didn't grow up playing that way."

Bravissimo, Freddy! "I am not a robot" – and while I was still savouring that, I read an advertisement for a £20 computer program, a "coaching tool" that allows the coach to do... well, just about everything. The – unstated, of course – premise of the tool is that the players are there to be ordered around, that they are, in fact, mere robots.

It doesn't do to get too upset at all this pseudo-scientific rubbish. The kids – just like Adu – can evidently make a nonsense of it all. Any lingering doubt I may have had on that count was dispelled by watching Brazil and Argentina – and indeed all 10 of the teams – in the South American Under-17 Championship. Skill, individuality, creativity, smiles, great football. And not a robot to be seen. ●

Illustration by Dave Semple

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Show some respect!

Arsene Wenger could learn a lot from the attitude towards match officials in rugby and cricket

ARSENE WENGER is for ever in search of justice on the football field. Barely a week goes by without the Arsenal manager passionately advocating the introduction of video replays or any other technology that would put an end to "mistakes" by referees.

Along with many others in soccer he points sceptics in the direction of other sports – rugby, cricket and tennis – to promote his case. They can do it, so why not us, is Wenger's insistent message.

Technology is used for line decisions in those sports. And there is a strong case for video adjudication on the relatively few goal-line incidents that occur in soccer – West Ham's winner against Blackburn the other week, for example, where replays instantly showed it should not have been a goal.

But that's the limit for soccer. Wenger is totally wrong in believing it can be used for other contentious issues such as diving and penalty-area tackles/fouls. These are a matter of opinion, and only the referee's verdict should count.

Manchester City manager Stuart Pearce conducted an experiment recently that illustrated why. He took all his backroom staff into a training room, made them watch controversial moments repeatedly on screen, and asked what the referee's decision should be. The staff were split 50-50 on most incidents.

TV replays don't help with opinion – which is why the absolute justice desired by Wenger is impossible. His crusade for video justice is fundamentally flawed.

Even on the matter of line decisions other sports have anguished debates because TV evidence is far from conclusive. Was it a try in rugby? Was it a run-out in cricket?

Crucial difference

What Wenger never mentions about other sports is the stark and crucial difference in their attitude to officials. In rugby and cricket there is a strong culture of respect for referees and umpires. Players and coaches accept as "part of the game" poor decisions that later prove to be mistaken. This is a sensible self-policing justice for sport – a justice that works.

In football, shamefully, there is widespread contempt for referees. Managers moan about them even though their own League Managers' Association (LMA) signed up this season to a public campaign to "Respect The Ref".

There is supposed to be a poster on every dressing room wall in the land to reinforce the power of this campaign. The message was long ago ignored, apart from a few shining exceptions such as Pearce, who follows the policy of his former mentor Brian Clough in never slating refs.

A number of Premiership managers have been punished by the FA this season, including Paul Jewell, Chris Coleman and Harry Redknapp. Jose Mourinho, surprisingly, escaped censure for calling a referee the "son of a whore" – because he had said it in Portuguese. Why did that make it acceptable?

The worst offender, however, has been Wenger. He was fined £10,000 and given a severe warning about his future conduct as punishment for aggressive behaviour towards then West Ham manager Alan Pardew.

Three days later, hardly chastened, Wenger was sent to the stands during a match against Portsmouth for directing angry words at a linesman. Three months later a charge of misconduct for this incident has still to be heard by the FA.

In the face of such supine authority, Wenger was at it again after defeat in the League Cup Final, calling a linesman a liar and accusing the FA of being dishonest in their treatment of Arsenal.

Respect for officials? Hardly. Another misconduct charge has been laid.

What kind of justice does Wenger face? If there is any moral force left at the FA, the Arsenal manager should be punished heavily, not just with a trivial fine or being made to sit in the stands. He should be banned from the entire stadium for five matches and banned from any telephone or computer contact with his club so that he cannot influence these games in any way.

That is the only deterrent for Wenger and other managers to swiftly mend their crass and contemptuous ways.

Justice is Wenger's choice of word. Joke would be a better one. He criticises officials only when his team lose and only when it suits him to draw attention away from the mistakes of his players or himself. He takes the cheap route of attack instead of showing empathy with officials whose task is made most difficult by the constant cheating of modern players.

Official bias against Arsenal? That's a joke too. In the first Premiership match after the League Cup Final, young midfielder Denilson made an over-the-top, studs-first tackle on Dave Kitson of Reading. Mistakenly, the referee booked Kitson. Naturally, there was no mention by Wenger of this clear injustice, no angry public denunciation of his own player. We all know why – it is the selfishness of managers such as Wenger who want justice only when it suits them.

Wenger's crusade is a sham. The best way, the only way, to a fairer game is to have managers such as Pearce who demand high standards from their players, who look at the real lessons to be learned from rugby and cricket, and who actively foster a culture of respect for referees. Justice begins with respect for the rule of law. Watch those other sports, Arsene. It can be done. ●

Illustration by Dave Semple

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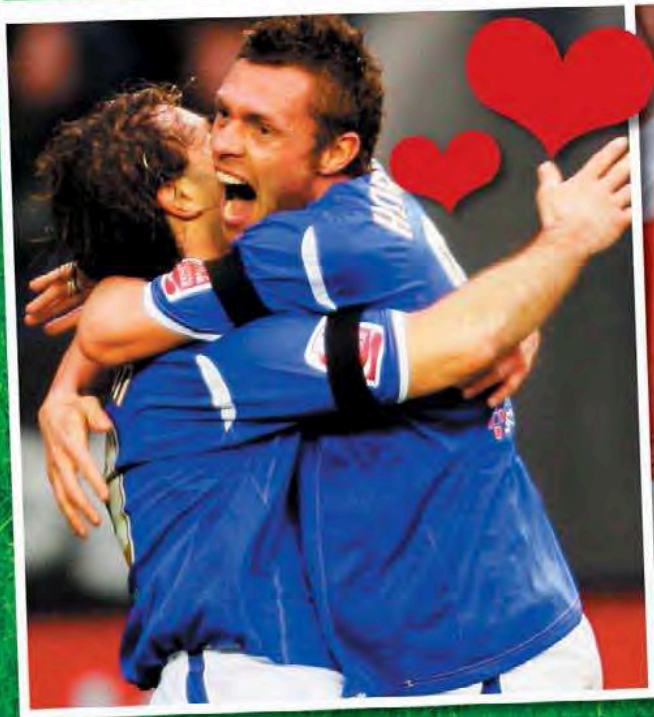

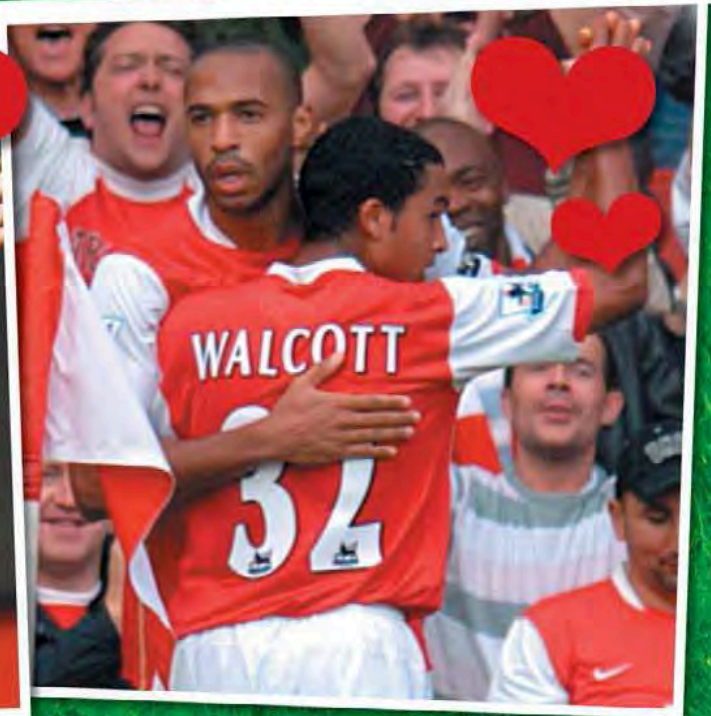

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Soaring Eagles...Benfica fans celebrate another win over their great Lisbon rivals

Absolute Classico

Benfica and Sporting, whose derby is in its centenary year, meet on April 29 at the Stadium of Light. Peterjon Cresswell looks back at a century of rivalry

THE BENFICA-SPORTING derby is in its centenary, with the first clash of 2007 on April 29 at the Stadium of Light. Neither side can afford to drop points, given that they were trailing champions FC Porto in this season's title race as we went to press. But, as with any big derby, there is far more to the fixture than mere league position.

O Classico, as the derby is known, represents a century of antagonism, traditionally between the people's team of Benfica and the aristocrats of Sporting. Today, there is no real class or geographical divide between the supporters – the clubs, who have 350,000 members between them, attract fans from all over the city and from all social groupings. They are also both major commercial concerns, each having a superbly equipped stadium that was completely rebuilt to host Euro 2004. But the prejudices run deep, and the intensity of the rivalry appears to be heightened by the fact that the stadiums are less than two miles apart.

Benfica have had the better of the derby meetings down the years, just as they have won more domestic titles and cups than Sporting and also more continental trophies (two European Cups to Sporting's single Cup-winners Cup). Sporting have won only a dozen or so league games at the Stadium of Light since the 1930s; the Eagles have a much better record at Sporting's Jose Alvalade stadium, including a 2-0 victory last December.

The English rendition of Benfica's stadium title is, of course, a misnomer – "Luz" does mean light in Portuguese but the stadium

takes its name from the Luz district of Lisbon where Benfica settled after several moves in the north of the city, including the Campo Grande district, where Sporting were based.

Benfica were formed in 1904 by the union of two smaller clubs, one with an Eagle badge but no ground, the other with access to the pitch at Benfica, a district of the city. The members were the educated sons of middle-class families, ex-pupils of a school in the Belem district, led by Anglophile Cosme Damiao, the club captain. They adopted red shirts and the motto "One For All". Despite this, and his international leanings, Damiao insisted that only Portuguese nationals play for the Eagles.

Rampant lion

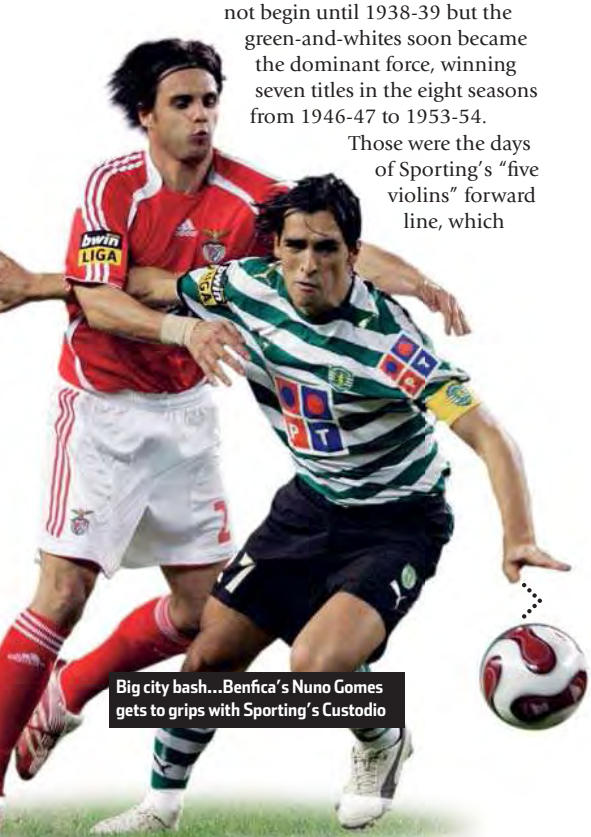
Half the members left to help form Sporting two years later, under the auspices of the Viscount of Alvalade, a local landowner. They adopted the rampant lion of Count Don Fernando de Castelo Branco, another club benefactor. Their original shirts were white, with green added later. Hoops were adopted from the rugby shirts the team borrowed when on a tour of Brazil in the 1920s.

The first derby, in December 1907, was played in pouring rain, and Sporting, with eight former Benfica players in their line-up, beat their new rivals 2-1. Damiao, of all people, scored an own goal after slipping as he tried to clear the ball.

A year later, Sporting won again, in a regional championship game that took place in an atmosphere of violence and intimidation.

The national league championship did not begin until 1938-39 but the green-and-whites soon became the dominant force, winning seven titles in the eight seasons from 1946-47 to 1953-54.

Those were the days of Sporting's "five violins" forward line, which



Big city bash...Benfica's Nuno Gomes gets to grips with Sporting's Custodio

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Fish and funiculars

● ARRIVAL & TRANSPORT

Lisbon airport, Portela, lies just 7km from the city centre. The Aerobus (€2.50; £1.70) runs into town every 20 minutes; a taxi should cost about €10 (£7). Long-distance trains arrive at Santa Apolonia station, just east of the centre. Lisbon's public transport consists of a four-line metro system, buses, trams and charming, antiquated funiculars and public lifts. Timetables and fares can be found at www.carris.pt. Taxis are cheap and plentiful. If you can't find one, call 218 119 000.

● HOTELS

You can easily find a decent, central two-star hotel for €70 (£50) per double room per night. The Lisboa Welcome Centre (Rua do Arsenal 15; +351 210 312 700; www.atl-turismolisboa.pt) in Rossio, the city's hub square, offers on-the-spot bookings. The Lisboa Regency Chiado (pictured, second top) (Rua Nova do Almada 114; +351 213 256 100; www.regency-hotels-resorts.com) offers chic decor and great views for €160-200 (£110-140). The central Orion Eden (Praca dos Restauradores 24; +351 213 216 600; www.viphotels.com), around €100 (£70), has art-deco architecture and a rooftop pool. The Pensao Praca da Figueira (Travessa Nova de Sao Domingos 9-3E; +351 213 424 323; www.pensaopracadafigueira.com) is a budget option at €40-60 (£28-40).

● EATING & DRINKING

Local food is bland but plentiful. Cod abounds. On the central Rua das Portas de Santo Antao, the Casa do Alentejo (No 58) and Solmar (No 108) are great settings. Pap' Acorda (Rua da Atalaia 57) is a fashionable choice in the Bairro Alto, Lisbon's nightlife hub. Good bars include Lisbona (No 196) and Portas Largas (No 103) on Rua da Atalaia and the nearby Estadio (Rua Sao Pedro de Alcantara 11). For coffee, the Cafe Nicola (pictured, bottom) (Praca Dom Pedro IV) is an institution.

● DAYTIME ENTERTAINMENT

Apart from Se Cathedral and the Castelo de Sao Jorge, central Lisbon lacks must-see sights. The district of Belem, with its fabulous Jeronimos Monastery, Monument to the Discoveries and Belem Tower (pictured), provides the best diversion. The Oceanario at the Parque das Nacoes Expo 98 site is the world's second biggest aquarium. Lisbon offers old-style shopping along Rua da Conceicao and around Chiado. There, on Rua do Carmo, Armazens do Chiado is a grand department store.

● AFTER DARK

The after-hours scene is down at the river. The stand-out club is Lux (Avenida Infante Dom Henrique; www.luxfragil.com), near Santa Apolonia station.

Showing support...a Sporting fan roars his side on

included the prolific Fernando Peyroteo, who shares the derby scoring record with Eusebio.

In 1956, Sporting opened their new stadium, naming it after Jose Alvalade, grandson of the viscount and also a leading light in the club's formation. At the same time, Benfica built the Stadium of Light, almost entirely from supporters' donations.

In 1960 word reached Lisbon of Eusebio, a Mozambican who had a shot like a rocket. Benfica won the race for his signature, bending the club rules to allow a foreigner to join, and the rest is history. With the Black Panther on board, Benfica dominated Portuguese football over the next decade, when they also won their two European Cups. Their fame has lived on across the continent, despite the fact that the club treaded water in the 1980s and 1990s.

Second fiddle

Sporting were left to play second fiddle. Indeed, the rise of Porto further dented the Lions' status. Sporting have won the odd title in the intervening years (their successes of 1999-2000 and 2001-02 were their first since 1982), but are still usually second favourites against the other sides of Portugal's Big Three.

Still, *O Classico* has its own niche in the Portuguese game. Eusebio scored both goals in Benfica's 2-0 win in December 1973, one of his last derbies, although it did not prevent Sporting from going on to win the title. The game had a tragic aftermath – referee Fernando Leite and the two linesmen were killed in a car crash on their way from the stadium.

The fixture list always pits the two clubs together at the end of the season, meaning that the game has often effectively decided the title. In 1984, under Sven Goran Eriksson, Benfica clinched the championship with a 1-1 draw as Porto, their closest challengers, lost. In 1994, the Eagles took the title more spectacularly, with a 6-3 win at the Alvalade.

Benfiquistas had to wait until 2005 for another title, which they virtually secured with a 1-0 win at home to Sporting. Porto kept Benfica waiting to make it absolutely certain, but that was hardly the point. ●

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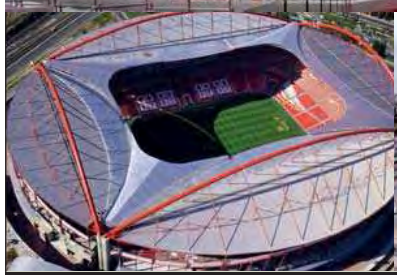

Top and left: the Stadium of Light from inside and out. Right: the Jose Alvalade

Light fantastic

BENFICA'S GLEAMING, new Stadium of Light (Avenida General Norton de Matos; +351 218 627 000) and Sporting's Jose Alvalade (Rua Fernando da Fonseca) are in the north of the city. Both were entirely rebuilt for Euro 2004, but retained the name of the 1950s arena they replaced.

The Benfica remodelling, Project Luz, was the responsibility of Damon Lavelle and his HKO Sport team of architects, who provided Sydney with its Olympic stadium. Lavelle remained true to the concept of the original Luz, keeping its red arches, while building around it a complex of shops, restaurants and a health club. Eusebio's statue remains.

The nearest metro station is Colegio Militar/Luz on the blue line. There are any number of options for a pre-match drink and snack in the four-tiered arena. The capacity is 65,000. Tickets are sold at 25 offices around the ground up to two weeks in advance. You can also buy them by phoning: +351 707 200 100.

The 50,000-capacity Alvalade is at Campo Grande on the yellow and green metro lines. The new ground has a multiplex cinema and health club, as well as a number of places to eat and drink. You can order tickets for a seat in either of the touchline stands (Bancada A or B) from the club's website (www.sporting.pt) for around €25 (£17). You can pick them up at the ground from three days to two hours before kick-off.

Benfica's ground is the de facto national stadium since Lisbon's Estadio Nacional has only basic facilities. It is also harder to get to – it is located deep in the woods of Caixas, a 30-minute tram ride from the city centre followed by a 15-minute walk. The stadium, where Celtic won the European Cup in 1967, is used for Portuguese Cup Finals.

You can also reach it from Belem, the location of Lisbon's other top division club, Belenenses. They play at the modest Estadio Restelo, next to Belem station. Regular suburban trains run there from the Cais do Sodre station in the city centre, a journey of 10 minutes.

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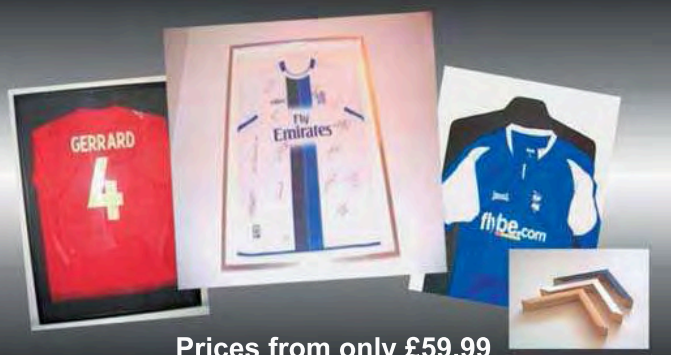

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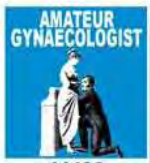

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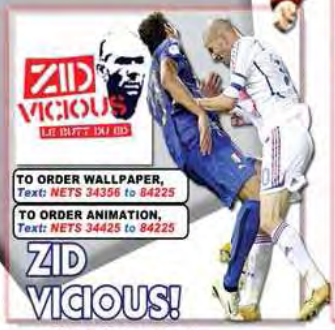

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Get in!...David Healy scores the first of his two goals in the 2-1 win against Sweden that put Northern Ireland top of their Euro 2008 qualifying group

EURO 2008 QUALIFIERS

Germans on top after win in Prague

GERMANY beat big GROUP D rivals the Czech Republic 2-1 in Prague to go above them on head-to-head record prompting Franz Beckenbauer to say: "At the moment we are the No 1 team in Europe." Headed goals from Kevin Kuranyi either side of half-time gave the Germans victory, though they had a nervous final quarter-hour after Milan Baros pulled a goal back with a deflected strike.

The Republic of Ireland drew level on points with the top two following 1-0 home victories over Wales and Slovakia. However, they have played more games than their rivals. The matches were played at Dublin's Croke Park, the first time the traditional home of gaelic sports had been used to stage football matches.

Heading for a draw...Serbia v Portugal

Poles in pole position

Poland have a great chance of reaching their first European Championship finals after opening up a five-point lead on Portugal, Serbia and Finland in GROUP A following two home wins. The 5-0 thrashing of Azerbaijan was followed by a more laboured 1-0 victory over a well-marshalled Armenia.

Wow factor...Germany's Bastian Schweinsteiger is ecstatic after Kevin Kuranyi scores one of his brace against the Czechs

Grounded...Bosnian keeper Adnan Guso feels the pain after being hit by a firecracker in Oslo

Finland, who had been top and unbeaten, lost 1-0 away to the Azeris, but Serbia suffered an even bigger shock, losing 2-1 in Kazakhstan, who had not previously won a competitive game since joining UEFA in 2002.

Four days later, the Serbs played out a hard-fought 1-1 draw with Portugal in Belgrade.

The Portuguese had been on a high after crushing Belgium 4-0 four days earlier in Lisbon.

Italy and France back on song

World champions Italy and runners-up France both revived their fortunes after sluggish starts in GROUP B.

The French, missing a number of regulars including Thierry Henry and Patrick Vieira, beat Lithuania 1-0 in Kaunas, with Chelsea midfielder Lassana Diarra making his debut. Nicolas Anelka secured the win with an excellent solo goal in the 73rd minute.

Italy were in commanding form as they beat Scotland 2-0 in Bari, Luca Toni scoring both goals from headers. The margin of victory could have been greater, but Hearts keeper Craig Gordon was in outstanding form.

Four days earlier in Glasgow, the Scots beat Georgia 2-1 in Alex McLeish's first game in charge, but they left it late, substitute Craig Beattie hitting the winner in the 89th minute.

Ukraine joined France and Scotland at the top after wins over the Faroe Islands (2-0) and Lithuania (1-0).

Turkey storm past Greece

Turkey came from behind against arch-rivals and reigning European champions Greece in Athens to secure a stunning 4-1 victory and go clear at the top of GROUP C.

Sotirios Kyrgiakos had given the hosts an early lead, but Tuncay Sanli hit back with a powerful right-foot shot 20 minutes later and the Turks made their attacking style pay with second-half goals from Gokhan Zan, Tumer Metin and Gokdeniz Karadeniz.

However, the Greeks reduced Turkey's three-point lead to just one four days later after beating Malta 1-0 while their rivals drew 2-2 against Norway. Simon Brenne and Martin Andresen had put the Norwegians 2-0 up, but Hamit Altintop took advantage of two mistakes by keeper Thomas Myhre to salvage a point. The game was played behind closed doors in Frankfurt as Turkey completed their three-game home ban imposed for the brawl at the World Cup qualifying play-off against Switzerland in 2005.

Bosnia-Herzegovina's 2-1 win in Oslo four days earlier was overshadowed by crowd violence. Firecrackers were thrown on to the pitch at the start of the game by Bosnian fans, one of them hitting visiting keeper Adnan Guso. English referee Mike Riley was forced to suspend the game for half an hour.

Croatia in front as England struggle

Croatia maintained their lead in GROUP E after coming from behind to beat Macedonia 2-1 in Zagreb. Goce Sedloski had given the visitors a surprise first-half lead from a free-kick, but substitute Dario Srna equalised just before the hour and then laid on the winner for Eduardo Da Costa three minutes from time.

Wins for Russia and Israel, both against Estonia, added to the problems of England manager Steve McClaren. His side could manage only a 0-0 draw in Israel and then struggled to beat Andorra, failing to score in the first half against the part-timers before hitting three after the break.

Alexander Kerzhakov scored both Russia's goals in their 2-0 win in Tallinn; Chelsea teenager Ben Sahar hit two of Israel's four against the Estonians in Tel Aviv.

Face off...Italy's Gennaro Gattuso gets to grips with Lee McCulloch of Scotland

Healy fires Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland manager Lawrie Sanchez called David Healy a "world-class finisher" after he hit a hat-trick in the 4-1 win in Liechtenstein and both the goals in the 2-1 home defeat of Sweden to send his country to the top of GROUP F. The haul put Healy top of the qualifying scorers' chart on nine.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic made his first appearance for the Swedes in six months in Belfast after agreeing to end his boycott. This had begun after he was sent home for breaking a training camp curfew before a September qualifier.

Spain struggled to home victories against Denmark and Iceland. Although they took a 2-0 first-half lead against the Danes, who had had Niclas Jensen sent off in the 20th minute, their opponents fought back to 2-1 just after half-time and nearly snatched a draw after a series of attacks. Four days later, Andres Iniesta scored the only goal late on as the Spanish came up against some superb goalkeeping from Arni Arason.

Lucky Dutch stay ahead

Holland rode their luck to stay top in GROUP G, securing a 1-0 win away to Slovenia after Giovanni Van Bronckhorst's late long-range shot took two deflections to beat keeper Samir Handanovic.

The *Oranje* had looked set for their second successive 0-0 draw, having been held by Romania in Rotterdam four days earlier in a performance that brought boos from the crowd.

Romania's 3-0 home win over Luxembourg put them up to second after Bulgaria were surprisingly held 0-0 at home by Albania. "A new competitive Romanian team has been born," was the verdict of coach Victor Piturca, who insists he has the players to qualify for a major tournament for the first time since 2000.

Gavin Hamilton

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It can't get much worse...Borussia Dortmund coach Jurgen Rober (right) is down in the dumps as his side lose 4-2 at Hannover just before his sacking

GERMANY

Chops as drop looms

NERVES CONTINUE to jangle in the lower reaches of the Bundesliga, where fears of demotion inspired both Borussia Dortmund and Arminia Bielefeld to make their third change of coach this season.

After a mere eight games in charge at Dortmund, Jurgen Rober, who took over from Bert Van Marwijk late last year, was unceremoniously dumped. He could have no complaints since, apart from a 3-2 home win over Bayern Munich in January and a 1-0 defeat of fellow strugglers Borussia Monchengladbach the following month, his side had been a shambles.

Just six points from 24 was simply not enough for the board or fans, whose reaction to a wretched 2-0 defeat at local rivals Bochum was to blockade the team bus for almost an hour. Something simply had to give. Not since the 1971-72 campaign had the Ruhr giants begun a spring campaign so badly.

So much for Dortmund's plan for Rober to hold the fort until the end of the season and then welcome aboard ex-Bielefeld boss Thomas Von Heesen. Borussia tried to persuade Von Heesen to bring forward his arrival date but he declined, clearly not fancying his chances of pulling the club out of their tail-spin. Instead, the job went to Thomas Doll, recently fired by Hamburg.

Doll can take encouragement from the raw material at his disposal – national team centre-backs Christoph Metzelder and Christian Worns, keeper Roman Weidenfeller and Swiss striker Alexander Frei. The hard part will be to instil some desperately-needed heart and cohesion in a team whose confidence has completely drained away.

Blink and you would have missed the time in office of Bielefeld's Frank Geideck. He graduated from assistant to head coach when Von Heesen resigned in mid-February but was ready to throw in the towel after just four games. Geideck asked to revert to the role of No 2 and successfully lobbied for Ernst Middendorp to come in as his superior.

This did not meet with wide approval in Bielefeld. Middendorp has had two previous stints at the club, but had not worked in the top flight for eight years. How would spells in Ghana (Asante Kotoko and Hearts of Oak) and South Africa (Kaizer Chiefs) prepare him for a Bundesliga relegation battle, asked the sceptics.

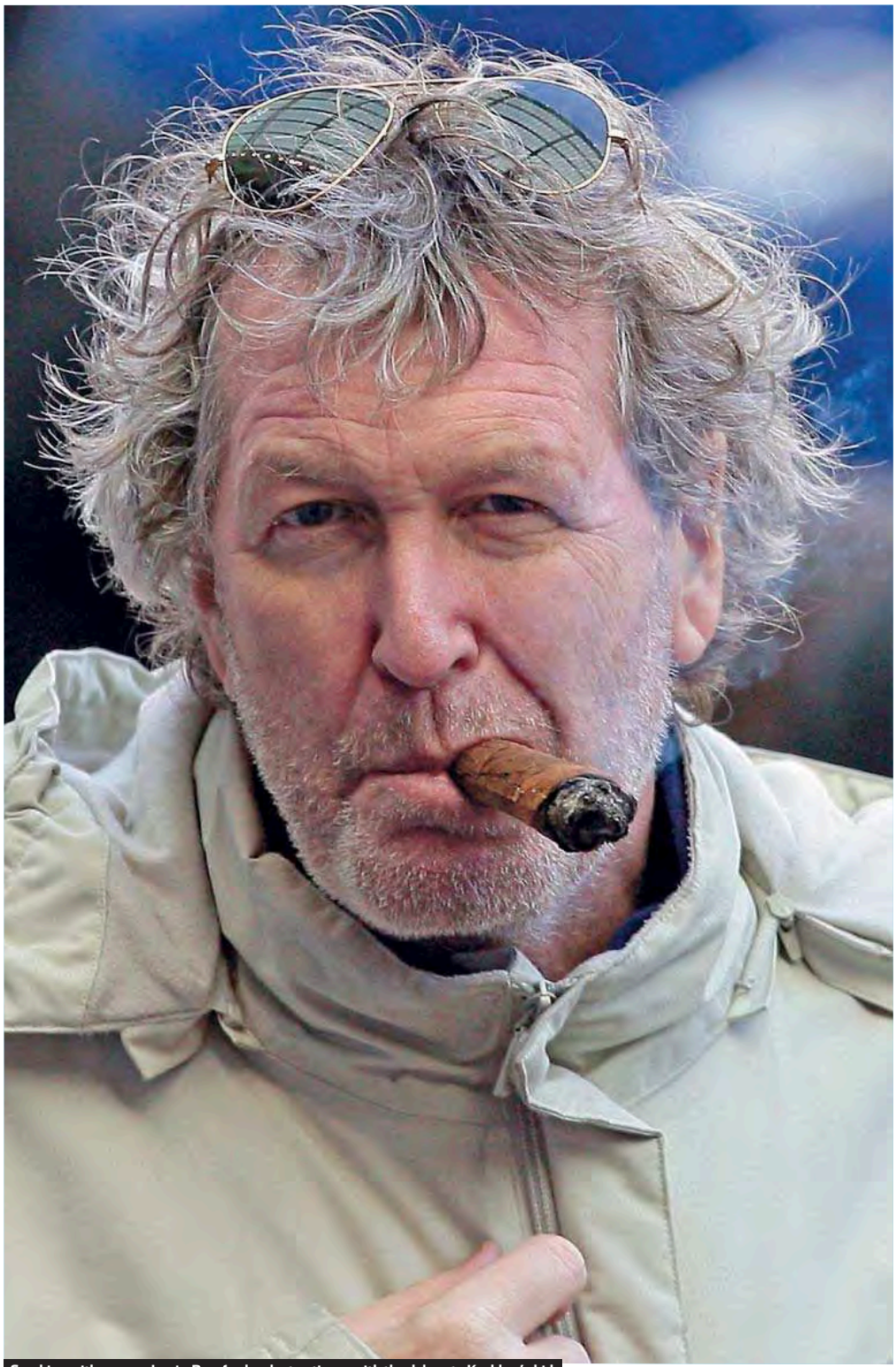
At Monchengladbach, general manager Peter Pander was ousted in favour of former Bayern Munich and Germany left-back Christian Ziege, who had been coaching the Gladbach under-17 side since ending his playing career because of chronic ankle trouble.

One person not happy to see Ziege's promotion was ex-Gladbach star midfielder Stefan Effenberg, who had touted himself as the next coach or manager. "It's a huge slap in the face," said Effenberg, still a controversial figure in German football. "I rang the president [Rolf Konigs] and offered to step in and help straight away. They offered me the job on a plate, then kicked me." Konigs replied that while Effenberg remained a "friend of Borussia", the club had always intended to go for an internal appointment.

Nick Bidwell

FRANCE

Marseille: deal or no deal?



Smoking with anger...Louis-Dreyfus has lost patience with the delays to Kachkar's bid

MARSEILLE OWNER Robert Louis-Dreyfus has apparently pulled the plug on selling the club to Syrian-Canadian businessman Jack Kachkar.

The sale should have been completed on March 23, but Kachkar apparently asked for more time to get together the reported £80million fee he had agreed. Given that negotiations opened in mid-December, it seems Louis-Dreyfus has grown weary of the shilly-shallying.

"Right from the start Robert said there were two conditions that needed to be fulfilled for the sale to go ahead," said Marseille president Pape Diouf. "The first was that the buyer had to have the funds. The second was that he had to be able to ensure the future well-being of the club. The chances that the club will now be sold to Kachkar are tiny."

The team could do without the instability. They endured a seven-game winless streak in the League, brought to an end by a 3-0 win over struggling Nice in mid-March, big-name players Franck Ribery and Djibril Cisse have continued to misfire, and there has been talk of dressing-room discontent.

But even despite that bad run of results and the fact they were only eighth, Marseille's win against Nice put them just two points behind Bordeaux in third. Lille, Sochaux, Toulouse and Saint-Etienne were all squeezed in between the two. Only Lens had their noses in front of the pack in the vain pursuit of champions and runaway leaders Lyon.

At the bottom, Paris Saint-Germain are once again in deep trouble having looked as if they were finally getting their act together under new coach Paul Le Guen. The club suffered four consecutive league defeats to slip to second bottom, and also exited the UEFA Cup at the hands of Benfica. The silver lining is that the bottom end of the table is almost as tight as the top, with the bottom six separated by just six points.

Howard Johnson

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Unhappy birthday...Vogel was told he was to be dropped on the day he turned 30

SWITZERLAND

Furore after Vogel axing

NATIONAL COACH Kobi Kuhn has said he would be willing to dispense with more squad members if necessary, despite the furore caused by his recent axing of long-time captain Johann Vogel.

Kuhn justified his decision by saying Vogel rarely showed true leadership qualities, but many observers feel it was, in fact, an attempt to end the divisiveness within the dressing room. This has been exacerbated by a run of three defeats, in friendlies against Austria, Brazil and Germany.

Vogel, who won 92 caps and has been captain since 2004, is believed to have been the rallying point for the French-speaking squad members, while forward Alexander Frei led the German-speaking contingent.

The manner of the axing added to the controversy, Kuhn telling Vogel by phone on the player's 30th birthday. According to the coach, Vogel reacted "very emotionally".

Zurich extended their league lead to seven points with a 1-0 win at lowly Thun, who had previously fired coach Heinz Peischl because of a run of poor results. Sion's Austria striker Sanel Kuljic has walked out claiming the club had not honoured the terms of his contract.

Ivar von Rulach

PORTUGAL

Benfica turn the screw

Benfica appear set to push defending champions FC Porto all the way in the title race, having put together a five-game winning run. Porto held a nine-point lead at one stage, but their 1-0 home defeat by Sporting Lisbon allowed Benfica, 1-0 winners at Estrela Amadora, to close to within one point after 22 of the 30 rounds.

Porto, still without injured teenage prodigy Anderson, have struggled to find consistency.

Portugal's preparations for their Euro 2008 qualifiers against Belgium and Serbia were rocked by an injury to Deco. The midfielder has to undergo surgery for an injury to his right hand.

Pedro Pinto

AUSTRIA

Money gone, points gone

Grazer AK, who are facing bankruptcy, have also been docked six points for failing to pay the wages of former defender Daniel Kinomi. The deduction left the club six points adrift at the bottom of the table.

President Stephan Sticher has filed for bankruptcy in the face of debts of about £10million, and although GAK have managed to stave off immediate closure by putting up a surety of

£450,000, there are doubts about whether they will receive a top division licence for next season, even if they escape the relegation zone.

Harry Miltner

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Kerr back with Saints

Former national team manager Brian Kerr is back in work, becoming director of football at his favourite club, St Patrick's Athletic. Kerr, who managed St Pat's from 1986 to 1996, has been out of football since the FA opted not to renew his contract in October 2005. Johnny McDonnell will continue as manager of the Dublin club.

Meanwhile, the Saints have been bought by Dublin-born property developer Garrett Kelleher, who made his fortune in the United States. The new owner has promised to redevelop St Pat's ground in Inchicore, putting an end to earlier plans to relocate.

There was some encouraging news for St Pat's fans on the field, too, as the team won their first three league games to lead the table and topped Group 2 of the all-Ireland Setanta Cup after three games.

Rob McDonald quit as manager of Sligo Rovers four days before the beginning of the season after a contract dispute.

Sean Creedon

LIECHTENSTEIN

Zaugg drops Ritter

New national team coach Hans-Peter Zaugg surprisingly omitted 41-times capped defender Christof Ritter from his squad for the visit of Northern Ireland in the Euro 2008 qualifiers. The only newcomer was Eschen/Mauren midfielder Christof Biedermann.

Vaduz have re-signed midfielder Marius Zarn from Aarau.

Graeme Crawford

In action...Bailly faces Anderlecht in the League

HOLLAND

Ajax stay five alive

AJAX KEPT THEIR hopes of an unlikely championship success alive by thrashing leaders PSV Eindhoven 5-1 at the Philips stadium. That closed the gap to five points with five games remaining.

Ajax outmuscled Ronald Koeman's side and the PSV coach, while afterwards dismissing the result as a one-off, accused his team of treating their opponents with "velvet gloves".

PSV's falter came two weeks after they had exited the Cup, losing 3-0 at NAC Breda in the quarter-finals. In addition, they were facing the run-in without Ivory Coast forward Arouna Kone and Brazilian defender Alex because of injury.

As last season, the teams finishing second to fifth in the League will play off to determine Holland's second Champions League entrants. AZ Alkmaar and Twente Enschede were virtually certain of taking two of the places, while the last spot looked to be between Feyenoord and Heerenveen, who meet on the final day of the season.

Twente have been the surprise package. By mid-March they had collected more points than any other team since the winter break, reaping the rewards of their attacking style under coaches Fred Rutten and Rene Eijkelkamp, both assistants under Guus Hiddink at PSV until last season.

Since the arrival of Ismail Aissati on loan from PSV, Twente have no fewer than three midfielders born in Holland of Moroccan descent – the other two are Karim El Ahmadi and Aissati's stand-in, Othman Bakkal, who is also on loan from PSV.

NEC Nijmegen striker Romano Denneboom will join Twente next season. He had been linked with PSV during the winter break, but the clubs could not agree on a fee.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Sandwiched...Ajax's Huntelaar forces his way between Da Costa and Afellay of PSV

BELGIUM

Genk's double trouble

LEAGUE LEADERS Genk suffered two extraordinary defeats in four days, leaving their hopes of a first Double well and truly extinguished.

First they were thrashed 6-0 by Anderlecht in a cup quarter-final, second leg, and then allowed the Brussels side to close the gap in the championship to just one point after a 5-0 capitulation at lowly Mons.

The latter defeat was particularly excruciating for keeper Logan Bailly, who, along with Germinal Beerschot striker Francois Sterchele, had just received a first call-up to the national squad for the Euro 2008 qualifier in Portugal.

The 21-year-old had been rested against Anderlecht, who led 1-0 from the first leg. But his replacement, Sinot Balat, was sent off in the 47th minute, leaving third-choice Davino Verhulst to endure the rest of the rout.

"Eleven goals in two games is impossible to explain," said Genk coach Hugo Broos, formerly with Anderlecht. "Mons had struggled to score in recent months while we had the best defence in Belgium. We have to find the cause of this goal avalanche and the solutions to stop it otherwise we will lose everything we have worked so hard to achieve in the past few months. That would simply be too painful."

In between the two cup matches, Genk had also played Anderlecht in the League, drawing 1-1.

The semi-finals paired Anderlecht with Standard Liege and Club Brugge with Gent.

Nicholas Harling

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DENMARK

End of the Royal line?

Two-way stretch...Martin Spelmann of Brondby and Copenhagen's Oscar Wendt duel in the Royal League Final

THE FUTURE OF the Royal League, the winter tournament for Scandinavia's top clubs, is under threat after just three seasons because no TV deal has yet been agreed for the next edition.

A combination of factors is responsible – attendances lower than for domestic league matches, only average TV viewing figures and the competition's domination by Danish clubs.

In this season's Final, Brondby beat city rivals FC Copenhagen 1-0 to deny them a hat-trick of titles, but the game, a dull affair, was watched by only 17,914, half the crowd that might be expected for a Superliga meeting. Martin Ericsson scored in the 37th minute from a controversial penalty, awarded for a foul on English defender Mark Howard by Jesper Gronkjaer. Howard later denied accusations that he had dived to win the spot-kick, but Copenhagen coach Stale Solbakken said: "It's hard to accept defeat after a penalty given when nobody was appealing."

The victory made it a perfect start for Brondby coach Tom Kohlert, who said: "Winning a trophy is always nice but just as important is that we have found a way of playing that is effective and suits us." That, presumably, was code for a defensive strategy.

Brondby chairman Per Bjerregaard was more concerned about the future of the tournament. "If we don't find a way forward and negotiate a new TV deal it doesn't look good for the Royal League," he said.

Before the Final, he suggested that giving the winners a UEFA Cup place would make the tournament a bigger attraction. But UEFA is extremely unlikely to earmark a place for a cross-national competition.

OB Odense also made the semi-finals, meaning Helsingborgs of Sweden were the only non-Danish club in the last four. OB's 2-1 defeat by Brondby was the last game in charge for coach Bruce Rioch, who has returned to England citing the need to spend more time with his family.

Jim Holden

NORWAY

Brann strengthen for title bid

Brann, last year's league runners-up, have signed midfielder Jan Gunnar Solli from champions Rosenborg and Ham-Kam's American full-back Ramiro Corrales as they aim to win the title for the first time since 1963.

Promoted Stromsgodset have also been prominent in the transfer market, their latest buy being veteran national team defender Andre Bergdolmo from FC Copenhagen.

Aalesund, the other promoted club, have finally accepted they have lost Brazilian Dede, cancelling his contract in mid-March after he failed to return to Norway following the Christmas holiday. However, the club have bought Estonia defender Enar Jaager, from Torpedo Moscow.

Sigurd Odegaard

FINLAND

Roy calls on Roman

Roman Eremenko was a surprise inclusion in the national team squad for the Euro 2008 qualifier in Azerbaijan but had apparently caught the eye of coach Roy Hodgson when playing for his club side, Siena, against Finland in a recent warm-up game.

The 20-year-old midfielder, whose older brother Alexei is a national team regular, is on loan at Siena from Udinese. Hodgson said: "I believe Roman has a future in the national team. He is a bright, intelligent player."

League champions Tampere United were dealt a serious blow in the run-up to the new season when experienced stopper Jussi Kuoppala was ruled out for several months with a knee injury.

Pentti Hietanen

ICELAND

Selection problems

National team boss Eyjolfur Sverrisson called up two new players – Hammarby left-back Gunnar Thor Gunnarsson and KR midfielder Atli Johannsson – for the Euro 2008 qualifier in Spain. But there was no disguising the selection problem facing the coach – of the 25 players who had represented Iceland in their previous four matches, only four were playing regular first-team football. The majority of the players are with Scandinavian clubs, whose leagues had not yet kicked off.

At home, Fylkir beat Vikingur 3-1 in the Final of the Reykjavik championship to claim their fourth capital title.

Rab Christie

ESTONIA

Levadia off to flier

Champions Levadia Tallinn hit the ground running in the new league campaign, winning their first three games with an 11-1 goals tally. However, the third game, a 2-1

defeat of city rivals Flora, proved costly for Levadia as Russian Under-21 striker Nikita Andrejev broke an arm and goalkeeper Artur Kotenko suffered a shoulder injury.

Meanwhile, Levadia have loaned forward Vladimir Voskoboinikov to Torpedo Moscow for six months.

Andres Must

LATVIA

Baltic League betting scandal

Dinaburg Daugavpils have been thrown out of the Baltic League competition because of a betting scandal relating to their 2-0 defeat by Trans Narva of Estonia in their opening game.

Dinaburg were favourites to win, and suspicions arose when, shortly before kick-off, large sums were bet in Latvia on Narva to win 2-0. The goals were scored in the 89th and 90th minutes.

The Baltic League committee eliminated Dinaburg the day after the game, saying its decision was based upon reports of the match delegate and the referee, which said that the club had violated fair play rules. The committee also said it would be handing over all relevant documents to the police.

Dinaburg president Oleg Gavrilov called the expulsion "absurd", and said his club would appeal.

Andres Must

WALES

Cup joy for Caersws

Underdogs Caersws won the League Cup Final in Aberystwyth, beating league high-fliers Rhyl 3-1 on penalties after a 1-1 draw. High winds made ball control difficult but the Bluebirds were deserving winners, if only for showing more spirit.

In the League, bottom club Caernarfon Town gave themselves hope of survival when beating fellow strugglers Cwmbran 3-0 away. It was Cwmbran's ninth straight defeat and left them only two points clear of the one relegation place.

Mel Thomas

NORTHERN IRELAND

Linfield lose Downing

League leaders Linfield suffered a major setback when new signing Conor Downing suffered a cruciate ligament injury that will keep him out of action for at least six months. The 24-year-old midfielder was Linfield's big buy of the January window, moving from championship rivals Cliftonville for £10,000.

The injury occurred during a 1-1 draw with Glentoran in the all-Ireland Setanta Cup. Glens also had their woes, with full-back Colin Nixon ruled out for the rest of the season with a knee injury.

Chris Keenan, the goalkeeper of struggling Larne, was felled by a golf ball thrown by a Linfield supporter seconds after making a vital penalty save near the end of the game. Fortunately, Keenan, who had given a superb performance, was able to continue after receiving treatment as Larne secured a 0-0 draw.

Roy Kitson

SCOTLAND

Silver at last for Hibs

HIBERNIAN THRASHED Kilmarnock 5-1 in the League Cup Final to end their 16-year wait for a major honour. But the trophy was a quick reward for former national team midfielder John Collins, in charge only since October in his first managerial role.

Rob Jones headed Hibs into the lead in the 28th minute and Abdessalam Benjelloun and Steven Fletcher scored twice each after the break as Killie caved in. Gordon Greer scored their consolation.

Alan Fairley

We're on our way...Rob Jones hails his opener for Hibs in the League Cup Final

Eyes on Champions League ...James Keene

SWEDEN

Champion move for Keene

CHAMPIONS ELFSBORG have fought off competition from Hammarby and GAIS Gothenburg to sign English striker James Keene. The 20-year-old, a product of Portsmouth's youth scheme, impressed when hitting 10 goals in 24 starts on loan at GAIS last term.

"I had a chat with [Elfsborg and Sweden midfielder] Anders Svensson, who played for Southampton and knows the English game," Keene said. "He convinced me to sign and now I am looking forward to playing in the Champions League qualifiers."

Helsingborgs, with Henrik Larsson back from his loan spell at Manchester United, have made three new signings – Icelandic midfielder Olafur Skulason, previously with Arsenal, and Benin duo Samir Beloufam, a defender, and striker Razak Omotoyossi.

Pentti Hietanen

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SERBIA

Bajevic stalks out

RED STAR BELGRADE coach Dusan Bajevic literally walked out on his job of eight months, leaving the dugout and exiting the stadium just after his team had gone 2-0 down to visitors Vojvodina and with the jeers of the home fans ringing in his ears.

Although Red Star were still top of the League despite the defeat (Vojvodina eventually won 3-0), their lead over arch-rivals Partizan had been cut from 14 points to six. The fact Partizan had won 4-2 at Red Star two weeks earlier hardly endeared Bajevic to the supporters.

It was not the first time Bajevic, who succeeded Italian Walter Zenga, had taken such drastic action. He also walked out on AEK Athens during a home league game against Iraklis in January 2004.

Two leaders of Red Star's Ultras turned up at the media conference after the Vojvodina game and stated that if the club didn't win the title, it "might be that someone else has to go" – a clear reference to president Dragan Stojkovic.

However, the red-and-whites bounced back under assistant coach Bosko Djurovski, beating OFK 1-0 away, while Partizan lost 1-0 at home to Hajduk Kula. Red Star also beat Cukaricki 2-0 in the cup quarter-finals, and the back-to-back wins prompted the club to stick with Djurovski, their central defensive stalwart of the 1980s, at least until the end of the season.

Smederevo coach Mihajlo Ivanovic was sacked with the team ninth of the 12 clubs and replaced by ex-Zeleznik and Obrenovac boss Goran Milojevic. That left only Mladost Apatin, Bezanija and Banat under the coach who had started the season.

Miroljub Rajic, FA general secretary since June 2005, has died of a heart attack at the age of 56.

Vladimir Novak

That's it, I'm off...Bajevic leaves the Red Star dugout – and his job – during the 3-0 home defeat by Vojvodina

TURKEY

Violence explodes at league game

The Ankaragucu-Besiktas league game was the scene of some of the worst fan violence in recent years in Turkish football, as fighting in the stands spilled over into a nearby park. Police were forced to use tear gas to regain control and almost 300 fans were detained. Ninety people were injured.

Ironically, the game, won by Besiktas, had been relatively calm, with just two bookings.

Suna Erdem

GREECE

Athens duo fight for second

With Olympiakos apparently well on their way to yet another league title, attention has switched to the battle between AEK Athens and Panathinaikos for the second Champions League spot.

It looked as if the latter had taken a decisive advantage after beating Olympiakos 1-0 away at the start of March. But Panathinaikos lost their next two games, both at home – to Ergotelis and Atromitos – to allow AEK to go four points clear of their rivals.

Olympiakos were eight points ahead of AEK with four games to play.

Lou Economopoulos

MONTENEGRO

"Barcelona" blunder

Branislav Milacic, new coach of leaders Buducnost, no doubt regretted calling his team "Montenegro's Barcelona" just before the spring campaign got under way after they lost 1-0 at lowly Mogren Budva in the first game back.

Fortunately, for Milacic and his side, closest challengers Zeta also lost their opening game, 1-0 at Petrovac, meaning Buducnost remained three points clear.

Miodrag Bozovic, Milacic's predecessor, has had to pull out of coaching fourth-placed Grbalj after Buducnost told the FA that he was in breach of contract.

Until the matter is resolved, Bozovic is supposedly not allowed to coach anywhere, but he has nevertheless joined Serbian top division side Borac Cacak.

Although, the Serbian FA have not granted Bozovic a coaching licence, Borac are attempting to get round the problem by naming him as technical secretary on official team sheets.

Vladimir Novak

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Uncapped fill boycott void

National coach Fuad Muzurovic called up no fewer than 11 uncapped players for the Euro 2008 qualifier away to Norway as a group of eight regulars continued their boycott of the team in the hope that it will bring changes in the federation hierarchy. Muzurovic's squad included only one player from the domestic league – Zrinjski goalkeeper Romeo Mitrovic.

Zdravko Reic

SLOVENIA

Domzale see off rivals

Domzale are closing in on their first league title after convincing victories over biggest rivals Gorica (4-0), the defending champions, and Maribor

(3-0) put them 17 points clear with 13 rounds remaining.

Zdravko Reic

CROATIA

Dinamo's eyes on Champions League

Dinamo Zagreb apparently have one hand on the championship trophy, lying eight points clear of Hajduk Split in mid-March, to allow club chief Zdravko Mamic to turn his attention to the holy grail of qualification for the Champions League group stage.

The executive vice-president has brought in striker Tomislav Sokota from FC Porto, making him the best-paid Croat in the League (£240,000 per year), and promised at least four more signings in the summer.

Mamic has also vowed that Dinamo would not sell any of their three young national team stars – Luka Modric, Vedran Corluka and Brazil-born Eduardo Da Silva.

Zdravko Reic

ISRAEL

Haifa help Beitar

Outgoing champions Maccabi Haifa did league leaders Beitar Jerusalem a big favour by beating second-placed Hapoel Tel Aviv 4-0. Beitar have hardly looked convincing in recent months, and the defeat of their rivals provided some welcome respite.

Maccabi Tel Aviv rose to second, four points off the pace, after beating MS Ashdod 1-0 away.

Maccabi Haifa, champions in five of the past six seasons, are only mid-table. Their elimination from the UEFA Cup by Espanyol leaves them with only the State Cup to aim for.

Ori Lewis

CYPRUS

Jardel fires on belated full debut

Former FC Porto and Brazil forward Mario Jardel had to wait almost two months for his first start for Anorthosis because of fitness problems but took the chance to shine when the opportunity came by scoring the opening goal in the 4-0 home defeat of lowly Pafos. Previously, he had made only two substitute appearances.

Anorthosis, who were third, 11 points behind leaders APOEL, with four games to play, must now decide whether to take the option to extend Jardel's contract for another 12 months.

Soulis Theodosiou

MALTA

Marsaxlokk march on

Marsaxlokk stayed on course for their first league title when beating third-placed Valletta 3-1 away to maintain their nine-point lead on Sliema Wanderers. It was the South Seasiders' fourth win out of four in the 10-game championship play-off campaign. The top division split into title and relegation pools after the regular season of 18 rounds.

Domenico Aquilina

MACEDONIA

Federation poll-axed

Pointing the way...rebel leader and ex-referee Emil Bozinovski

THE FEDERATION is in crisis after beleaguered president Haralampie Hadzi-Risteski barely won a "back-me-or-sack-me" vote at a congress meeting in the city of Struga on March 17. Only 55 of the 106 delegates attended the session, and although they all voted for the president to remain in office, the figure was just one more than the lowest possible majority.

An anti-Hadzi-Risteski grouping, called the Board for Change, had appealed to delegates to boycott the session and claimed that 35 had attended a parallel meeting in the capital, Skopje.

In the wake of the vote, the Board, headed by former international referee Emil Bozinovski, a prospective presidential candidate, and backed by ex-national team star Darko Pancev, said the congress had no quorum and that any decisions it made would not be valid. It then named the date for a new congress session – April 7 – and called on its supporters to take control. Hadzi-Risteski responded by saying the Board did not have the authority to call a session of congress.

The president had called the vote in the face of accusations of financial mismanagement and maladministration, and his implication in an alleged cover-up relating to federation documents.

There was trouble on the pitch during a Baskimi-Vardar league game, when visiting midfielder Ertan Demiri was assaulted at half-time by home fans. The Vardar players refused to appear for the second half because of fears for their safety and were later awarded the game 3-0. Last season Baskimi were forced to play seven home games on neutral soil as punishment for hooliganism by their fans.

Michel Stojmanovski

Future bleak...Igli Tare

ALBANIA

Baric axes captain Tare

NATIONAL COACH Otto Baric caused a shock by dropping 33-year-old captain and forward Igli Tare from the squad for the Euro 2008 qualifiers against Slovenia and Bulgaria. The Croat tried to explain the decision, saying: "I want to bring new players into the team. Some decisions may be painful, but I have to build a side for the future". However, Baric undercut his words by including another 33-year-old striker, Alban Bushi.

Tare said: "Baric is the boss and he picks the players. I can only accept his decisions, but I don't think the best time to make changes in the national team is in the middle of a qualifying campaign."

Gezim Nushi

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UKRAINE

Lucescu turns on Elano

To the rescue...Sevilla keeper Andres Palop thwarts Shakhtar's Olexiy Bielik during the second leg of the UEFA Cup tie in Donetsk

SHAKHTAR DONETSK coach Mircea Lucescu singled out Brazil midfielder Elano for blame after the team managed to lose after being on the verge of knocking out holders Sevilla in the UEFA Cup. Shakhtar led 4-3 on aggregate with a minute to play of the second leg, but then Sevilla keeper Andres Palop came up for a corner to score a dramatic equaliser, and Javier Chevanton hit the winner for the Spaniards in extra-time.

"Some of the players failed to approach the match with the responsibility that a game like this demands," Lucescu fumed. "Most of all I got upset by Elano, even though he scored the second goal. Had he been a bit more precise with the ball and kept it for 20 seconds, or, even better, won a free-kick, that would have been the end of the match."

There has been bad feeling between the two for months after Elano refused to take his place on the bench for a home tie with Nancy in the UEFA Cup group stage. As punishment, Lucescu left him out of the starting line-up for all but two games. Before the Sevilla tie, Elano had made public his desire to leave, and Lucescu's words will surely hasten his departure.

Shakhtar's exit from Europe, albeit at the hands of the holders, has brought the wisdom of their big winter sale under greater scrutiny. Billionaire president Rinat Akhmetov surprised many observers by agreeing to allow captain Anatoliy Tymoshchuk to join Zenit St Petersburg, even if it was for a hefty £10million. Other key departees were Nigeria forward Julius Aghahowa (to Wigan), Ukraine defender Vyacheslav Sviderskyi (Chornomorets), Brazilian defender Leonardo (Santos) and Croatia goalkeeper Stipe Pletikosa (Spartak Moscow).

Co Adriaanse made a dreadful start as coach of Metalurh Donetsk, losing his first three league matches. On arrival, the Dutchman had suggested a UEFA Cup place was quite possible, but that now seems out of the question.

Oleg Zadernovsky

ROMANIA

Little Elton's big impact

Diminutive Brazilian midfielder Elton had an excellent debut at Steaua Bucharest, scoring a fine goal and creating numerous chances for his team-mates in the 2-0 defeat of Arges Pitesti. But it was Steaua's only win of the year up to that point, and though the former Corinthians player, who is only 1.58m (5ft 2in), is now being viewed as a saviour, the club were still 13 points behind runaway leaders and city rivals Dinamo.

The day after Elton's exploits, 18-year-old striker Liviu Ganea also scored on his debut for Dinamo in a 1-1 draw at UTA Arad. Ganea is the first star product of the football school founded by former international Gica Popescu in his home city of Craiova.

Florin Marin has been sacked by Ceahlaul Piatra Neamt after a run of poor results left them in the relegation zone. His replacement is Aurel Sunda.

Radu Timofte

CZECH REPUBLIC

Slavia go top as Sparta slip

Sparta Prague suffered a shock 3-0 defeat at home to Jablonec on the first day of the spring campaign to allow city rivals Slavia to leapfrog them at the top. It was Sparta's first league loss under coach Michal Bilek, who took charge in

September, and their heaviest at home since the Czech Republic came into being in 1993. Slavia beat champions Slovan Liberec 1-0 to lead by a point.

Striker Zbynek Pospech has left Liberec, third after 19 rounds, for Norwegian side Odd Grenland.

Dagmar Damkova, who in 2003 became the first woman to referee in the top division, has been dropped from the list after failing a fitness test.

Sam Beckwith

HUNGARY

Honved on the up

Honved, the former club of 1950s stars Ferenc Puskas and Jozsef Bozsik, eased their relegation worries by winning three games in a row, including a defeat of leaders Debrecen. The upturn has come under Attila Supka, who led Debrecen to the title in 2005. He has skilfully blended a host of players of different nationalities, including Mexican midfielder Jose Manuel Rivera, Ivorian Benjamin, Brazilian Diego, Mozambican Genito, Croatian keeper Sandro Tomic and Serb Igor Bogdanovic.

There has also been improvement off the pitch, with the crumbling Bozsik stadium fully renovated thanks to the backing of owner George F Hemingway, a Hungarian-American businessman.

Debrecen's defeat allowed MTK, who drew 2-2 with Vasas, to go top.

Peterjon Cresswell

BULGARIA

Petrov back on the menu

FORMER NATIONAL TEAM captain Stilian Petrov has ended his international exile after five months following a heart-to-heart with coach Hristo Stoichkov. A personality clash had prompted the Aston Villa midfielder to quit last October, but the pair resolved their differences during a lunch in Vienna.

"Stoichkov and I made big compromises in the name of the national team," Petrov said. "We smoothed away our differences, but the details of our talk will remain private. I am glad I will play for Bulgaria again."

Stoichkov said: "Stilian Petrov went through a very difficult period. I never chased him away from the national team. He understood that the team is bigger than any one individual. I hope that with him in the team we will continue our successes in the European qualifiers and that the fans will support him."

CSKA Sofia sacked coach Plamen Markov when the team slipped six points behind league leaders and city rivals Levski at the start of the spring campaign after draws with Cherno More and Lokomotiv Plovdiv.

Markov's replacement is a fellow former national team boss, Stoicho Mladenov. It is his second spell in charge – he led CSKA to the title in 2003 after they set a league record of 13 consecutive victories. He was sacked later that year after defeat by Galatasaray in the Champions League qualifiers and UEFA Cup elimination at the hands of Torpedo Moscow.

Ruthless Levski thumped Chernomorets 10-0 to eclipse the club's previous best of 9-1 against Borislav Kyustendil in 1933. CSKA hold the national record, a 12-0 thrashing of Torpedo Russe in 1951.

Rumen Paytashev

All for the shirt...Petrov, seen taking on Wales' Ryan Giggs, has resolved his differences with coach Stoichkov

Numbers game...Anatoliy Tymoshchuk

RUSSIA

Zenit splash the cash

ZENIT ST PETERSBURG made up in style for the loss of national team forward Alexander Kerzhakov to Sevilla, splashing out £10million for Shakhtar Donetsk midfielder Anatoliy Tymoshchuk and making two other big signings – Tom Tomsk and Russia striker Pavel Pogrebnyak and Rubin Kazan's Argentinian playmaker Alejandro Dominguez.

Zenit began the league campaign by being held 1-1 at home by Saturn then beating Rostov 3-2 away. The early pacesetters were FC Moscow, the only side to win their first two games – against Luch-Energiya (1-0 away) and Tom (2-0 at home).

Moscow, who play home games at the old Torpedo stadium, are an ambitious young club who are supported by city mayor Yuri Luzhkov and coached by the young and talented Leonid Slutski. He has already been dubbed the "Russian Mourinho" after the early victories, which eclipsed the efforts of Zenit and Moscow rivals CSKA, Spartak and Lokomotiv, the four teams considered this season's title favourites.

CSKA, who did the Double last year, beat Spartak 4-2 in the Super Cup. The latter finished runners-up in both the League and the Cup.

Victor Gusev

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ARGENTINA

Ramon rallies San Lorenzo

Let's keep it going...Diaz gives advice to striker Gaston Fernandez during the win over Boca Juniors

SAN LORENZO, who finished only ninth in the opening championship, topped the closing standings by three points after six rounds and were the only unbeaten side. Much of the credit for the turnaround goes to coach Ramon Diaz, the former River Plate striker and boss, whose motivational skills are clearly working wonders given his squad limitations.

San Lorenzo's wins included a shock 3-0 triumph at Boca Juniors, who bounced back with a 3-1 win at opening champions Estudiantes and a 5-1 home thrashing of Gimnasia y Esgrima La Plata to go third.

Martin Palermo hit a hat-trick in the first game and four in the second. The striker, whose prolific record but cumbersome style have earned him the tag "Argentina's worst great player", is still 28 short of Boca's all-time individual scoring record of 181, held by Francisco Varallo, the only surviving member of Argentina's 1930 World Cup team.

Varallo, now 94, said: "I cheer every time Palermo scores because Boca are my team, but I hope he doesn't beat my record. Otherwise, who is going to remember me?"

River Plate were second, a point behind San Lorenzo and two ahead of Boca, but far from convincing. Two of their five wins came with last-gasp goals against Lanus and lowly Quilmes, the latter a "header" by Ariel Ortega which went in off his arm. The former international was making his first appearance since undergoing a rehabilitation programme for alcoholism.

Four coaches have already bitten the dust. Relegation-threatened Nueva Chicago parted company with Rodolfo Motta supposedly because of health problems, although he joined second division Platense a few days later. Patricio Hernandez was fired by bottom club Banfield, and fellow strugglers Rosario Central sacked Nestor Gorosito, who was reportedly told he had to go because club officials said they were being threatened by their hooligan gang over the poor results.

There was apparently an element of player power in the departure of Nery Pumpido at Newell's Old Boys, who had gone 14 games without a win. Certainly, when the run was finally ended, 1-0 at Racing Club, the delighted players threw their shirts en masse to their fans. However, the referee took exception and booked the whole team, plus the substitutes. This put five players on five yellow cards, which brings a one-match suspension.

Eric Weil

CHILE

Can U believe it!

Universidad de Chile's season began with a comedy of errors. The club, declared bankrupt last year and still in the hands of an administrator, were left without a game on two of the first five weekends because of safety problems at their opponents' stadiums. A third match, at Rancagua side O'Higgins, was also postponed after a plague of termites damaged the stands at the ageing El Teniente stadium.

Given that Universidad picked up only five points from their first six matches, playing was probably even more painful than not. Coach Salvador Capitano, who had only just taken over, was fired and replaced by Jorge Socias.

In contrast, Colo Colo were on course for a third straight title after winning their first eight games.

Brian Homewood

MEXICO

Ruiz takes on Sharks

Former Paraguay boss Anibal Ruiz has become the third coach this year to occupy the hot seat at struggling Veracruz. Ruiz took over after the Red Sharks fired Emilio Gallegos, who had been in charge for only four games after replacing Argentinian Pedro Monzon.

Nery Castillo's future with the national team was in doubt after he failed to turn up for friendlies against Paraguay and Ecuador. The Olympiakos midfielder, who is qualified to play for Mexico, Uruguay and Greece, appeared to have put his hat in the Mexican ring when called up for the friendly against the USA in February. However, he did not play after being injured in training.

Although coach Hugo Sanchez said Castillo had provided a plausible excuse for missing the Paraguay and Ecuador games, there was speculation that the youngster had had second thoughts.

Brian Homewood

CANADA

Toronto set ticket record

New MLS side Toronto FC have set a league record by selling 14,000 season tickets. Their first home game will be on April 28 against Kansas City Wizards.

Philippe Germain

PERU

Ancash facing belated demotion

THE CHAMPIONSHIP was thrown into confusion when the federation's disciplinary tribunal ruled that Sport Ancash, who had already played seven games of the new season, should have been relegated last year.

The ruling came after the tribunal decided to dock Ancash four points for fielding an ineligible player. This meant their points tally for 2006 was now lower than that of Jose Galvez, who had been relegated.

The latter were due to be reinstated, but faced a backlog of games. Ancash, whose matches to date were likely to be voided, threatened to take the case to FIFA.

Former international Julio Cesar Uribe has taken charge of the national team for a second time, replacing Franco Navarro, whose contract ended in December.

The main objective for Uribe, previously in charge in 2000-01, is to take Peru to their first World Cup since 1982, when, incidentally, he was in the team. But he got off to a troubled start as a number of key players dropped out for his first match back, a friendly in Japan.

Jefferson Farfan, Paolo Guerrero, Alberto Rodriguez and Juan Vargas were injured, Andres Mendoza pulled out because of visa problems, and Bayern Munich's Claudio Pizarro, still smarting after he was suspended by the federation last year for missing a friendly against Chile, refused to accept a call-up. Pizarro said the federation failed to officially tell him about his ban in the first place and had not told him it had been lifted either.

Uribe also faced criticism of his own conduct after his last match in charge of leading club side Cienciano ended in an ugly melee. Uribe led the protests as his players surrounded the referee following a 3-2 home defeat by Melgar, who won with a controversial last-minute penalty after coming from 2-0 behind. Two Cienciano players were sent off while one of the club's ball boys whacked a ball against a linesman.

Peru's referees association called for sanctions against Uribe and Cienciano president Juvenal Silva – who also happens to be president of the federation's national teams committee.

Brian Homewood

Trouble with club and country...Julio Cesar Uribe

Hitting hard...Montero (left)

URUGUAY

Montero blasts domestic game

FORMER NATIONAL team captain Paolo Montero, who has returned home to finish his career with Penarol, made a damning indictment of the Uruguayan game during a radio interview. "Let's be honest, our football is nearly amateur," said the ex-Juventus centre-back. "Here, we have a lot of teams and a lot of players, but I'd say only five or six institutions pay decent salaries.

"Domestic football is not competitive, and the national team has shown this. I'm partly to blame because we didn't qualify for the World Cup. Our generation hasn't achieved anything. We've stopped in time because everyone says a lot but nobody thinks about a project and a way of organising things.

"They don't think about the young players. When I was young, there were football boots for the players who couldn't afford them. It was like a family. Now that has all changed. There's no more willingness to teach, and perhaps the players have lost the willingness to learn.

"The directors always say we have to put ourselves in their place but they never put themselves in our place. They don't think about the players who come home in the evening and have nothing to offer their family."

Montero, who terrorised opposing forwards and smashed Serie A records for red cards during 10 years with Juventus, remains an uncompromising figure. Despite missing games through injury, he has already been sent off twice in his six months with Penarol.

Brian Homewood

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Paying the price...an early Gulf Cup exit cost Saudi Arabia coach Paqueta his job

ASIAN CUP

Paqueta joins casualty list

BRAZILIAN Marcos Paqueta was axed by Saudi Arabia following the team's failure to win the Gulf Cup. He is the fourth of the 16 Asian Cup finalists' coaches to have been sacked since the draw was made in mid-December.

The Saudis, three-times Gulf Cup winners, lost 1-0 to eventual champions and hosts United Arab Emirates in the semi-finals. Paqueta, who took charge in December 2005, was replaced by compatriot Helio dos Anjos, who has coached numerous clubs in his homeland, including Fortaleza and Sao Caetano. Milan Macala, Peter Withe and Hans-Pieter Briegel are the other three coaches to have lost their jobs – with Oman, Indonesia and Bahrain respectively.

In contrast, Frenchman Bruno Metsu, coach of Asian Cup qualifiers UAE, has been awarded a three-year contract extension, until 2010, after the Emirates' first Gulf Cup success.

Michael Church

JAPAN

Grampus Eight hit three in a row

Nagoya Grampus Eight won their first three J.League games of the season, suggesting that coach Seff Vergoossen has continued where he left off last season in improving the fortunes of the long-time under-achieving club.

"We are not always brilliant, but when we have a problem, everybody works very hard for each other to fix it," Vergoossen said after the third win, at home to Albirex Niigata.

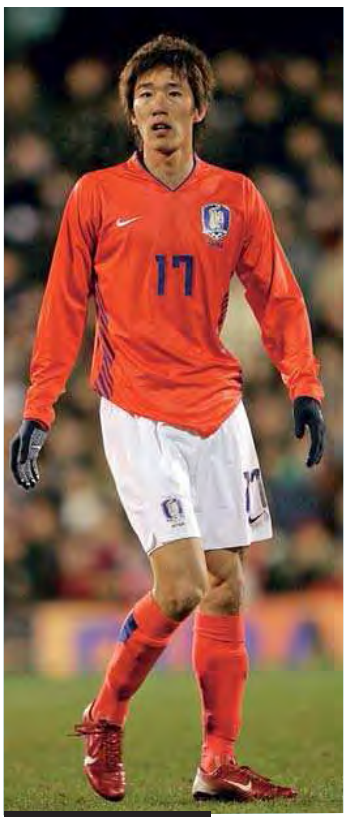
The Dutchman took charge last season, when he steered Grampus to seventh place after they had had a brush with relegation the previous term.

The run of success – and clean sheets (all the wins were 2-0) – has come despite severe disruption to the defence. Slovak Marek Spilar was injured 19 minutes into the opening match at home to JEF United, and Atsushi Yoneyama in the second at Ventforet Kofu.

South Korean midfielder Kim Jung-woo showed his strikers the way by scoring in each of the victories.

Gamba Osaka, third last year, were behind Grampus only on goal difference after they, too, won their first three games without conceding a goal.

Mike Plastow & Yumiko Nagae


On target...Kim Jung-woo

ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Sydney start well

SYDNEY FC made an impressive start in the Asian Champions League – the first time Australian clubs have competed – beating Shanghai Shenhua 2-1 in China and then drawing 2-2 after leading 2-0 at home to Japanese Double winners Urawa Reds.

Adelaide United, Australia's other representatives, lost 1-0 at home to Chinese opponents Shandong Luneng but followed up with a 2-0 win away to Vietnamese underdogs Dong Tham Long An.

Both Aussie sides are under new coaches. Branko Culina, father of national team midfielder Jason Culina, has replaced Terry Butcher at Sydney, while former Socceroos captain Aurelio Vidmar has taken the Adelaide reins from John Kosmina.

Iranian champions Esteghlal have been excluded for not submitting their player list in time, leaving only three clubs in Group B.

Michael Church

Pat on the back...Ufuk Talay (bending) is mobbed after scoring Sydney's second goal against Shanghai Shenhua

AUSTRALIA

Flooding back

Three overseas-based Australians have already agreed to return to their homeland for the next A-League season. Former Socceroos striker Paul Agostino is joining Adelaide United, his hometown club, after 13 years in Europe, the last 10 with 1860 Munich. The other returnees are Ljubo Milicevic (Young Boys to Melbourne Victory) and Danny Tiatto (Leicester City to Queensland Roar).

Auckland-based New Zealand Knights have had their A-League licence withdrawn after twice finishing bottom. They will be replaced by another Kiwi team, as yet nameless, representing Wellington. The newcomers will be managed by current New Zealand national coach Ricki Herbert, and have a wealthy backer in property developer Terry Serepisos.

Paul Moon

ALMA TV CUP

Brawl mars Kazakh win

Kazakhstan won the four-nation Alma TV Cup after drawing 1-1 with hosts Uzbekistan in the deciding game. But the outcome was marred by a mass brawl after referee Dmitry Mashentsev ignored Uzbekistan claims for a penalty. Uzbek midfielder Anvar Soliev was seen to punch the official during the melee. An Uzbekistan win would have given them the trophy on goal difference.

Oleg Zadernovsky

ROUND-UP

ASIA

● VIETNAM national team players Le Van Truong and Pham Van have been given four-year bans for rigging a match at the 2005 South-east Asian Games.

● BANGLADESH has launched its 11-team professional B-League, with Abahani and Muktijoddha drawing 0-0 in the opening match.

● Seoul won their first three games in the SOUTH KOREAN League to lead by two points.

● TURKMENISTAN champions MTTU did the Double by beating FC Ashgabat 3-2 in the President's Cup Final.

Azam Mahmood & Oleg Zadernovsky

OCEANIA

● Waitakere United clinched NEW ZEALAND'S regular season title in style, hammering Otago United by a league record 8-0. Youngheart Manawatu and Auckland City finished second and third respectively and were due to play-off to determine Waitakere's Grand Final opponents.

● Lossi and Baco secured two of the championship play-off places in NEW CALEDONIA, with five clubs still in contention for the third and final berth.

● Dragon won the opening stage of the League in TAHITI and will take two bonus points into round two. The other qualifiers are Tefana, Manu Ura, Pirae and Temanava.

Paul Moon

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AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALIFIERS

Ivorians on the cusp

FOUR COUNTRIES maintained their 100 per cent record in the latest round of African Nations Cup games as the qualification picture became much clearer.

Ivory Coast are just a win away from the finals, in Ghana next January, after beating Madagascar 3-0 away in Group 1. The path for the Ivorians, who beat Gabon 5-0 in their opening game, became more straightforward with the withdrawal of Djibouti.

Nigeria (Group 3), Cameroon (Group 5) and Angola (Group 6) were the other 100 per cent teams, but the Nigerians were far from impressive in beating Uganda 1-0 in their debut under former Germany coach Berti Vogts. The Ugandans had a seemingly justified penalty appeal turned down late on after Nwankwo Kanu had scored in a goalmouth scramble.

Cameroon shrugged off the departure of Dutch coach Arie Haan by beating Liberia 3-1, while Angola hammered Eritrea 6-1. Flavio, of Egypt's Al Ahly, scored twice, and there was also a rare goal from Benfica's Mantorras. Six Eritrean players sought asylum after the game in a bid to escape conflict in their homeland.

Holders Egypt won 3-0 at home against Mauritania and Tunisia beat Seychelles by the same score to take a grip on Group 2 and Group 4 respectively.

South Africa went clear in Group 11 by beating Chad 3-0 away in hostile conditions in their first game under former Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira. The temperature in N'Djamena was 42ºC and the pitch bone-hard and bumpy.

Marseille striker Mamadou Niang hit a hat-trick for Senegal as they beat Tanzania 4-0 to go top of Group 7.

Guinea are back in contention with Algeria in Group 8 after a 2-0 win in Gambia in their first game under veteran French coach Robert Nouzaret.

Zimbabwe strikers Benjani Mwaruwari and Peter Ndlovu faced punishment after coming to blows, allegedly over a woman, on the eve of the 1-1 draw with Morocco in Group 12.

Only the winners of the 12 groups are guaranteed a place in Ghana, who qualify automatically. The other berths go to the three runners-up with the best records.

Mark Gleeson

Competition time...Egypt's Zidan and Mossa of Mauritania

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Saint George booted out

The foibles of the African game were highlighted by two bizarre incidents in the first round of the Champions League.

Fans of Etoile du Congo invaded the dressing room of visitors Saint George of Ethiopia before kick-off, stole half the team's boots and melted back into the crowd. Police had to wade in to rescue the items before the game could get under way. Saint George, who later described the incident as "psychological intimidation", lost 2-0 to exit 2-1 on aggregate.

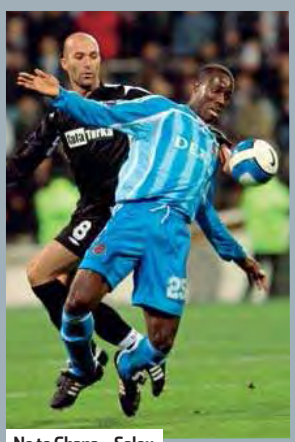
In Togo, Rwanda's APR had four players dismissed in the second leg against Maranatha Fiokpo then walked off with the aggregate at 2-2 after the referee gave a penalty against them, the second in a matter of minutes. APR were expelled from the tournament.

Seven former winners reached the last 16, led by defending champions Al Ahly, of Egypt, who beat Highlanders of Zimbabwe 2-0. The others are Moroccans Wydad Casablanca and FAR Rabat, Tunisia's Esperance, TP Mazembe Englebert (DR Congo), JS Kabylie (Algeria) and ASEC Abidjan (Ivory Coast).

The biggest fallers were five-times winners Zamalek. Al Ahly's Cairo rivals, led by former France and Ivory Coast coach Henri Michel, went down 4-2 to Al Hilal of Sudan.

Mark Gleeson

ROUND-UP



No to Ghana...Salou

● CONGO beat Gabon 1-0 in the Final of the annual CEMAC Cup, for central African countries. Hosts Chad beat Equatorial Guinea on penalties to take third place.

● Jacob Mulee started his third stint as KENYA coach with a 2-0 home win against Swaziland in the African Nations Cup qualifiers. The game went ahead after FIFA lifted their five-month international ban on Kenyan teams the week before. The suspension was imposed because of political interference in the running of the Kenyan FA.

● Curepipe Starlight won the Challenge Cup in MAURITIUS, beating Savanne 1-0 in the Final.

● GHANA coach Claude Le Roy says Belgium-based Ibrahim Salou and Holland-born Quincy Owusu-Abeyie are no longer part of his plans since neither has shown any interest in playing for the Black Stars.

● German Antoine Hey quit as coach of GAMBIA saying the federation owe him money. Port Authority beat Hawks United 4-2 on penalties after a 1-1 draw to win the Super Cup.

● Louis Watunda, who led the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO to the semi-finals of the 1998 African Nations Cup, has died aged 60. Watunda won eight Congolese league titles – with Kalamu, Daring Club Motema Pembe and St Eloi Lupopo. He also worked in South Africa, Burkina Faso and, most recently, Gabon.

Mark Gleeson

Game for all ages...the Northern Mariana Islands national team are ready to embark on East Asian competition

Pacific vim

WHEN US ATTORNEY Peter Coleman arrived on the Northern Mariana Islands in the western Pacific two years ago, his thoughts soon turned to soccer and finding a game for his teenage son.

The 82,000 people living on the chain of 14 islands rejected independence in the 1970s in favour of being a US trust territory, and as a consequence sports such as American football and baseball are more popular.

Soccer did not even have an organised league, so Coleman, who had pitched up on the main island of Saipan, set about establishing one. He placed adverts for players and organisers in the two local newspapers, the *Saipan Tribune* and the *Marianas Variety,* and set about finding a suitable location to hold trials.

Saipan is only 20km long and 9.5km wide, so finding a pitch not already used by one of the "US" sports was difficult. Eventually the American Memorial Field was secured, and it was to be heavily used over the coming weeks.

The adverts had produced much more interest, at least in terms of young players, than Coleman had expected. He says: "We had originally anticipated 150 players turning up but instead found ourselves with more than 300. This presented some logistical problems, and we soon realised that we had a shortage of adult volunteers. Needless to say, our first season was wrought with new trials, but we muddled through."

Early on, Coleman had formed the Northern Mariana Islands Football Association, taking the role of general secretary, with Jerry Tan, a keen football fan and local businessman, coming in as president. Crucially for the future, Tan was a friend of Richard Lai, FA president on the neighbouring island of Guam, another semi-independent territory under United States jurisdiction.

Once NMIFA was up and running, there arose the issue of affiliation. The Oceania confederation was claiming Coleman's organisation as an associate member, which he did not understand since NMIFA was a new body and had had no discussions about joining. "We contacted Oceania numerous times but never got any response," he says, adding that since there had not been any formally organised football on the islands for many years there could hardly still be a link to Oceania even if one had formally existed.

An attempt to join FIFA was rebuffed so instead NMIFA used Guam's membership of the East Asian Football Federation (EAFF) as a springboard to gain entry to that organisation, a subsidiary of the Asian Football Confederation.

The Northern Marianas were invited as a guest team to last July's EAFF Under-14 Championship in Beijing, to compete against big countries such as Japan and China. The youngsters lost all their games and failed to score a single goal, but NMIFA was not discouraged. In December, EAFF accepted NMIFA as a provisional member. As we went to press, the senior team were due to play their first games in years – a two-leg preliminary round tie against Guam for a place in the 2008 EAFF Championship qualifiers.

As a US trust territory, all national team players must have a US passport. These are few and far between among the locals, meaning that NMIFA have had to scrabble around to find enough players. Vince Stravino, another US expat who now organises the islands' various leagues, has filled one of the holes, coming out of retirement having played in his youth.

He says: "It is a tall task as our team is made up of guys from 13 to 48 who are more adept at Ultimate Frisbee, triathlons and pub crawls than performing on the football pitch – but here's to football!"

Steve Menary

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INTERNATIONALS

EURO 2008 QUALIFIERS

Group A

Mar 24 - Almaty
Kazakhstan 2 (Ashirbekov 47, Zhumaskaliev 61)
Serbia 1 (Zigic 67)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hrinak (Slk)
Kazakhstan: Loria - Smakov, Kuchma, Zhalmagambetov, Irismetov, Skorykh, Sergienko (Chichulin 58), Baltiev, Suyumagambetov (Finonchenko 80), Zhumaskaliyev, Ashirbekov (Byakov 71).
Serbia: Stojkovic - Markovic, Vidic, Stepanov, Tosic, N Kovacevic, Ergic (Koroman 70), Jankovic, Krasic, Pantelic (Lazovic 70), Zigic. Sent off: Zigic 90min.

Mar 24 - Warsaw
Poland 5 (Bak 2, Dudka 5, Lobodzinski 33, Krzynowek 58, Kazmierczak 84)
Azerbaijan 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 14,000. **Ref:** Jakobsson (Ice)
Poland: Boruc - Wasilewski, Dudka, Bak, Michal Zewlakow, Lobodzinski, Lewandowski, Gargula, Krzynowek (Jelen 77), Zurawski, Matusiak (Kazmierczak 68).
Azerbaijan: Hasanzade - A Kerimov, Abbasov, Pereira, I Gurbanov, Chertoganov, Bakhshiev, Imamaliev (Aghakishiyev 65), Gomes (Ladaga 61), K Kerimov (Dzavadov 67), Subasic.

Mar 24 - Lisbon
Portugal 4 (Nuno Gomes 53, Cristiano Ronaldo 55, 75, Quaresma 68)
Belgium 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 47,000. **Ref:** Vassaras (Gre)
Portugal: Ricardo - Miguel, Ricardo Carvalho, Jorge Andrade, Paulo Ferreira, Tiago, Petit (Fernando Meira 76), Joao Moutinho, Quaresma (Nani 70), Cristiano Ronaldo (Hugo Viana 78), Nuno Gomes.
Belgium: Stijnen - Clement, Hoefkens (Sterchele 65), Van Buyten, Van der Heyden, De Man, Defour, Fellaini, Martens (Chatelle 56), Mudingayi, M Mpenza (Van Damme 81).

Mar 28 - Baku
Azerbaijan 1 (Imamaliev 83)
Finland 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 14,000. **Ref:** Messina (Ita)
Azerbaijan: Veliyev - Abbasov, R Guliev, A Kerimov, Ladaga (Imamaliev 66), Pereira, Aghakishiyev, Chertoganov, Sultanov (I Gurbanov 76), Gomes (Nadyrov 10), Subasic.
Finland: Jaaskelainen - Tihinen, Hyypia, Kallio, Pasanen, A Eremenko, Heikkinen, Kolkka (Kuqi 85), Johansson (Forssell 86), Litmanen, Vayrynen.

Mar 28 - Kielce
Poland 1 (Zurawski 26)
Armenia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,500. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Poland: Boruc - Wasilewski, Dudka, Bak, Michal Zewlakow, Blaszczykowski, Lewandowski, Gargula, Kazmierczak (Sobolewski 61), Krzynowek (Jelen 83), Zurawski.
Armenia: Berezovsky - Hovsepyan, Arzumanyan, Dokhoyan, Melikyan, Pachajyan, Hachatryan, Shakhgeldyan, Nazaryan (Manucharyan 46), Artavazd Karamyan (Melkonyan 69), Zebelyan (Mkhitaryan 75).

Mar 28 - Belgrade
Serbia 1 (Jankovic 37)
Portugal 1 (Tiago 5)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 50,000. **Ref:** Layec (Fra)
Serbia: Stojkovic - Duljaj, Vidic, Krstajic, Dragutinovic, Jankovic (Koroman 68), Stankovic (Markovic 78), N Kovacevic, Tosic (Lazovic 84), Krasic, Pantelic.
Portugal: Ricardo - Miguel (Caneira 72), Ricardo Carvalho, Jorge Andrade, Paulo Ferreira, Petit, Tiago, Joao Moutinho (Raul Meireles 77), Simao, Nuno Gomes (Quaresma 82), Cristiano Ronaldo.

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Poland	7	5	1	1	12	5	16
Portugal	6	3	2	1	13	4	11
Serbia	6	3	2	1	8	4	11
Finland	6	3	2	1	7	3	11
Belgium	6	2	1	3	4	6	7
Kazakhstan	6	1	2	3	3	8	5
Azerbaijan	6	1	1	4	2	13	4
Armenia	5	0	1	4	0	6	1

16.08.06 Belgium-Kazakhstan..... 0-0
02.09.06 Poland-Finland..... 1-3
02.09.06 Serbia-Azerbaijan 1-0
06.09.06 Armenia-Belgium..... 0-1
06.09.06 Azerbaijan-Kazakhstan..... 1-1
06.09.06 Finland-Portugal 1-1
06.09.06 Poland-Serbia 1-1
07.10.06 Armenia-Finland 0-0
07.10.06 Kazakhstan-Poland..... 0-1
07.10.06 Portugal-Azerbaijan 3-0
07.10.06 Serbia-Belgium..... 1-0
11.10.06 Belgium-Azerbaijan 3-0
11.10.06 Kazakhstan-Finland 0-2
11.10.06 Poland-Portugal 2-1
11.10.06 Serbia-Armenia..... 3-0
15.11.06 Belgium-Poland 0-1
15.11.06 Finland-Armenia 1-0
15.11.06 Portugal-Kazakhstan 3-0
24.03.07 Kazakhstan-Serbia 2-1
24.03.07 Poland-Azerbaijan..... 5-0
24.03.07 Portugal-Belgium..... 4-0
28.03.07 Azerbaijan-Finland..... 1-0
28.03.07 Poland-Armenia..... 1-0
28.03.07 Serbia-Portugal..... 1-1
02.06.07 Azerbaijan-Poland
02.06.07 Belgium-Portugal
02.06.07 Finland-Serbia
02.06.07 Kazakhstan-Armenia
06.06.07 Armenia-Poland
06.06.07 Finland-Belgium
06.06.07 Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan
22.08.07 Armenia-Portugal
22.08.07 Belgium-Serbia
22.08.07 Finland-Kazakhstan
08.09.07 Azerbaijan-Armenia
08.09.07 Portugal-Poland
08.09.07 Serbia-Finland
12.09.07 Armenia-Azerbaijan
12.09.07 Finland-Poland
12.09.07 Kazakhstan-Belgium
12.09.07 Portugal-Serbia
13.10.07 Armenia-Serbia
13.10.07 Azerbaijan-Portugal
13.10.07 Belgium-Finland
13.10.07 Poland-Kazakhstan
17.10.07 Azerbaijan-Serbia
17.10.07 Belgium-Armenia
17.10.07 Kazakhstan-Portugal
17.11.07 Finland-Azerbaijan
17.11.07 Poland-Belgium
17.11.07 Portugal-Armenia
17.11.07 Serbia-Kazakhstan
21.11.07 Armenia-Kazakhstan
21.11.07 Azerbaijan-Belgium
21.11.07 Portugal-Finland
21.11.07 Serbia-Poland

Group B

Mar 24 - Toftir
Faroe Islands 0
Ukraine 2 (Yezerskyi 21, Husiev 58)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 717. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)
Faroe Islands: Mikkelsen - S Olsen (T Hansen 74), Djurhuus, Atli Danielsen, S Samuelsen (Holst 66), R Jacobsen, Benjaminsen, Thomassen (S Joensen 71), a Borg, C Jacobsen, O Johannesen.
Ukraine: Shovkovskyi - Yezerskyi, Rusol, Chygrynskyi, Nesmachnyi, Tymoshchuk (Shelaiev 82), Husiev (Vorobei 65), Mikhalik, Kalinichenko, Voronin (Nazarenko 71), Bielik.

Mar 24 - Kaunas
Lithuania 0
France 1 (Anelka 73)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Lithuania: Karcemarskas - Klimavicius, Skerla, Zvirgzdauskas, Paulauskas, Stankevicius, Semberas, Morinas (Beniusis 82), Savenas (Kalonas 77), Danilevicius, Poskus (Radzinevicius 86).
France: Coupet - Sagnol, Thuram, Gallas, Abidal, Toulalan, Makelele, L Diarra, Malouda (Diaby 89), Govou (Cisse 63), Anelka.

Mar 24 - Glasgow
Scotland 2 (Boyd 10, Beattie 89)
Georgia 1 (Arveladze 39)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 50,850. **Ref:** Vollquartz (Den)
Scotland: Gordon - G Alexander, Naysmith, Weir, McManus, Ferguson, Teale (Brown 59), Hartley, McCulloch, K Miller (Maloney 90), Boyd (Beattie 76).
Georgia: Lomaia - Shashiashvili, Salukvadze, Khizanishvili, Eliava, Burduli (Siradze 56), Menteshashvili (Gogua 46), Tskitishvili (Mujiri 90), Kobiashvili, Demetradze, Arveladze.

Mar 28 - Tbilisi
Georgia 3 (Siradze 25, A Iashvili 45, pen 90)
Faroe Islands 1 (R Jacobsen 57)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Saliy (Kaz)
Georgia: Lomaia - Kobiashvili (Menteshashvili 61), Salukvadze, Shashiashvili, Kankava, Kvirkvelia, Mujiri, Tskitishvili, Demetradze, A Iashvili, Siradze.
Faroe Islands: Mikkelsen - Atli Danielsen, Djurhuus, O Johannesen, S Olsen, Benjaminsen, a Borg (S Samuelsen 90), Thomassen, av Flotum (Holst 43), C Jacobsen, R Jacobsen. Sent off: Benjaminsen 65min.

Mar 28 - Bari
Italy 2 (Toni 12, 70)
Scotland 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 37,500. **Ref:** De Bleeckere (Blg)
Italy: Buffon - Oddo, Cannavaro, Materazzi, Zambrotta, Gattuso, De Rossi, Camoranesi, Perrotta (Pirlo 76), Di Natale (Del Piero 65), Toni (Quagliarella 87).
Scotland: Gordon - G Alexander, Naysmith, Weir, McManus, Ferguson, Teale (Maloney 65), Hartley, K Miller, Brown (Beattie 85), McCulloch (Boyd 80).

Mar 28 - Odessa
Ukraine 1 (Husiev 47)
Lithuania 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Meyer (Ger)
Ukraine: Shovkovskyi - Yezerskyi, Rusol, Kucher, Nesmachnyi, Tymoshchuk, Mikhalik (Shelaiev 70), Husiev (Vorobei 79), Kalinichenko (Chygrynskyi 82), Voronin, Shevchenko.
Lithuania: Grybauskas - Semberas, Klimavicius, Paulauskas, Stankevicius, Skerla, Zvirgzdauskas, Savenas (Kalonas 51), Morinas (Gedgaudas 55), Poskus (Radzinevicius 64), Danilevicius.

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ukraine	5	4	0	1	8	4	12
Scotland	6	4	0	2	11	6	12
France	5	4	0	1	12	2	12
Italy	5	3	1	1	9	5	10
Georgia	6	2	0	4	13	12	6
Lithuania	5	1	1	3	3	5	4
Faroe Islands	6	0	0	6	1	23	0

16.08.06 Faroe Islands-Georgia..... 0-6
02.09.06 Georgia-France 0-3
02.09.06 Italy-Lithuania..... 1-1
02.09.06 Scotland-Faroe Islands..... 6-0
06.09.06 France-Italy..... 3-1
06.09.06 Lithuania-Scotland..... 1-2
06.09.06 Ukraine-Georgia..... 3-2
07.10.06 Faroe Islands-Lithuania 0-1
07.10.06 Italy-Ukraine 2-0
07.10.06 Scotland-France 1-0
11.10.06 France-Faroe Islands..... 5-0
11.10.06 Georgia-Italy 1-3
11.10.06 Ukraine-Scotland 2-0
24.03.07 Faroe Islands-Ukraine..... 0-2
24.03.07 Lithuania-France..... 0-1
24.03.07 Scotland-Georgia 2-1
28.03.07 Georgia-Faroe Islands..... 3-1
28.03.07 Italy-Scotland..... 2-0
28.03.07 Ukraine-Lithuania 1-0
02.06.07 France-Ukraine
02.06.07 Lithuania-Georgia
02.06.07 Faroe Islands-Italy
06.06.07 Faroe Islands-Scotland
06.06.07 France-Georgia
06.06.07 Lithuania-Italy
08.09.07 Georgia-Ukraine
08.09.07 Italy-France
08.09.07 Scotland-Lithuania
12.09.07 France-Scotland
12.09.07 Lithuania-Faroe Islands
12.09.07 Ukraine-Italy
13.10.07 Faroe Islands-France
13.10.07 Italy-Georgia
13.10.07 Scotland-Ukraine
17.10.07 France-Lithuania
17.10.07 Georgia-Scotland
17.10.07 Ukraine-Faroe Islands
17.11.07 Lithuania-Ukraine
17.11.07 Scotland-Italy
21.11.07 Georgia-Lithuania
21.11.07 Italy-Faroe Islands
21.11.07 Ukraine-France

Group C

Mar 24 - Piraeus
Greece 1 (Kyrgiakos 5)
Turkey 4 (Tuncay 26, Gokhan Unal 55, Tumer 71, Gokdeniz 82)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 31,405. **Ref:** Stark (Ger)
Greece: Nikopolidis - Dellas, Kyrgiakos, Seitaridis, Fissas (Torosidis 56), Katsouranis, Basinas, Karagounis, Giannakopoulos (Amanatidis 72), Haristeas (Gekas 63), Samaras.
Turkey: Volkan Demirel - Servet, Hamit Altintop, Gokhan Zan, Ibrahim Uzulmez (Volkan Yaman 19), Mehmet Aurelio, Tumer (Gokdeniz 80), Sabri, Gokhan Unal (Huseyin 57), Hakan Sukur, Tuncay.

Mar 24 - Chisinau
Moldova 1 (Epureanu 85)
Malta 1 (Mallia 73)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Aliyev (Aze)
Moldova: Pascenco - Golovatenco, Epureanu, Olexic, Bordian, Rebeja, Comleonoc, Namasco (Dadu 81), Frunza (Alexeev 74), Bugaiov, Zmeu (Ivanov 63). Sent off: Dadu 84min.
Malta: Haber - Said, Briffa, Dimech, G Agius, Michael Mifsud (Sciberras 90), Woods (Sammut 77), Mallia, Schembri (Bogdanovic 70), Scicluna, Pace. Sent off: Dimech 84min.

Mar 24 - Oslo
Norway 1 (Carew pen 50)
Bosnia-Herzegovina 2 (Misimovic 18, Muslimovic 34)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 16,987. **Ref:** Riley (Eng)
Norway: Myhre - Storbaek (Brenne 78), Hangeland, Hagen, J A Riise, Stromstad (Grindheim 61), Andresen, Haestad, Gamst Pedersen, F Johnsen (Iversen 46), Carew.
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Guso - Berberovic (Music 67), Nadarevic (Radeljic 46), Bajic, Hrgovic, Custovic (Maletic 81), Damjanovic, Misimovic, Krunic, Muslimovic, Ibisevic.

Mar 28 - Budapest
Hungary 2 (Priskin 9, Gera 63)
Moldova 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 6,200. **Ref:** Ingvarsson (Swe)
Hungary: Vegh - Csizmadia, Balogh (Vasko 36), Juhasz, Bodor, Vadocz, B Toth, Tozser, Hajnal (Huszti 64), Gera, Priskin (Tisza 89).
Moldova: Pascenco - Olexic, Epureanu, Golovatenco, Comleonoc (Zmeu 67), Bordian, Cojocari, Ivanov (Namasco 45), Corneencov, Bugaiov, Frunza (Alexeev 46).

Mar 28 - Valletta
Malta 0
Greece 1 (Basinas pen 66)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Alves Garcia (Por)
Malta: Haber - Azzopardi, Said, Briffa, Scicluna, G Agius, Michael Mifsud, Mallia (Barbara 90), Schembri (Bogdanovic 71), Sammut, Pace. Sent off: Briffa 66min.
Greece: Chalkias - Dellas (Anatolakis 84), Torosidis, Vyntra, Kyrgiakos, Kapsis, Basinas, Karagounis, Katsouranis, Gekas (Samaras 90), Salpingidis (Limberopoulos 64).

Mar 28 - Frankfurt, Germany
Turkey 2 (Hamit Altintop 72, 89)
Norway 2 (Brenne 31, Andresen 40)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Farina (Ita)
Match played behind closed doors
Turkey: Volkan Demirel - Hamit Altintop, Emre Asik, Servet, Mehmet Aurelio, Emre Belozoglu, Gokdeniz (Mehmet Yildiz 79), Tumer (Volkan Yaman 46), Sabri, Tuncay, Hakan Sukur (Huseyin 90).
Norway: Myhre - Storbaek, Hagen, Hangeland, J A Riise, Stromstad, Andresen, Haestad (Skjelbred 57), Brenne (Nevland 85), Carew, Helstad (Holm 63).

GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Turkey	5	4	1	0	14	3	13
Greece	5	4	0	1	8	4	12
Bosnia-Herz	5	2	1	2	10	12	7
Norway	5	2	1	2	9	6	7
Hungary	5	2	0	3	7	8	6
Malta	5	1	1	3	5	10	4
Moldova	6	0	2	4	3	13	2

02.09.06 Hungary-Norway..... 1-4
02.09.06 Malta-Bosnia-Herz..... 2-5
02.09.06 Moldova-Greece..... 0-1
06.09.06 Bosnia-Herz-Hungary 1-3
06.09.06 Norway-Moldova..... 2-0
06.09.06 Turkey-Malta..... 2-0
07.10.06 Greece-Norway 1-0
07.10.06 Hungary-Turkey 0-1
07.10.06 Moldova-Bosnia-Herz 2-2
11.10.06 Bosnia-Herz-Greece..... 0-4
11.10.06 Malta-Hungary 2-1
11.10.06 Turkey-Moldova 5-0

24.03.07 Greece-Turkey 1-4
24.03.07 Moldova-Malta..... 1-1
24.03.07 Norway-Bosnia-Herz..... 1-2
28.03.07 Hungary-Moldova 2-0
28.03.07 Malta-Greece 0-1
28.03.07 Turkey-Norway..... 2-2
02.06.07 Bosnia-Herz-Turkey
02.06.07 Greece-Hungary
02.06.07 Norway-Malta
06.06.07 Greece-Moldova
06.06.07 Bosnia-Herz-Malta
06.06.07 Norway-Hungary
08.09.07 Hungary-Bosnia-Herz
08.09.07 Malta-Turkey
08.09.07 Moldova-Norway
12.09.07 Bosnia-Herz-Moldova
12.09.07 Norway-Greece
12.09.07 Turkey-Hungary
13.10.07 Greece-Bosnia-Herz
13.10.07 Hungary-Malta
13.10.07 Moldova-Turkey
17.10.07 Bosnia-Herz-Norway
17.10.07 Malta-Moldova
17.10.07 Turkey-Greece
17.11.07 Greece-Malta
17.11.07 Moldova-Hungary
17.11.07 Norway-Turkey
21.11.07 Hungary-Greece
21.11.07 Malta-Norway
21.11.07 Turkey-Bosnia-Herz

Group D

Mar 24 - Nicosia
Cyprus 1 (Aloneftis 45)
Slovakia 3 (Vittek 54, Skrtel 67, Jakubko 77)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 3,500. **Ref:** Lehner (Aut)
Cyprus: Morphis - Theodotou (Georgallides 43), Louka, Lambrou, Garpozis (Charalambous 67), Charalambidis, Satsias, Michael, Makrides (Elia 58), Aloneftis, Yiasoumi. Sent off: Morphis 41min.
Slovakia: Contofalsky - Singlar (Zofcak 46), Skrtel, J Durica, Gresko, Borbely, Krajcik, Sapara (Kozak 68), Svento, Vittek, Jakubko (Sestak 80).

Mar 24 - Prague
Czech Republic 1 (Baros 76)
Germany 2 (Kuranyi 41, 62)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 18,000. **Ref:** Rosetti (Ita)
Czech Republic: P Cech - Ujfalusi (Vlcek 84), Jiranek, Rozehnal, Jankulovski, Galasek (Kulic 67), Sionko (Plasil 46), Rosicky, Polak, Koller, Baros.
Germany: Lehmann - Lahm, Mertesacker, Metzelder, Jansen, Frings, Ballack, Schneider, Schweinsteiger, Kuranyi, Podolski (Hitzlsperger 89).

Mar 24 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 1 (Ireland 39)
Wales 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 72,539. **Ref:** Hauge (Nor)
Rep Ireland: Given - O'Shea, McShane, Dunne, Finnan, Ireland (Doyle 59), Douglas (Hunt 80), Carsley, Kilbane, Duff, Keane (McGeady 90).
Wales: Coyne - Ricketts, Evans, J Collins, Nyatanga, Bale (D Collins 74), S Davies, Robinson (Easter 90), Ledley (Fletcher 46), Bellamy, Giggs.

Mar 28 - Liberec
Czech Republic 1 (Kovac 20)
Cyprus 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 9,310. **Ref:** Bebek (Cro)
Czech Republic: P Cech - Ujfalusi, Grygera (Kovac 12; Jiranek 27), Rozehnal, Jankulovski, Jarolim, Rosicky, Galasek, Polak, Baros (Plasil 75), Koller.
Cyprus: Georgallides - Theodotou, Paraskevas, Lambrou, Elia (Charalambous 75), Charalambidis (Krassas 75), Satsias, Makrides, Aloneftis, Yiasoumi (Haili 71), Okkas.

Mar 28 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 1 (Doyle 13)
Slovakia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 65,535. **Ref:** Baskakov (Rus)
Rep Ireland: Given - O'Shea, McShane, Dunne, Finnan, McGeady (Quinn 87), Carsley, Kilbane, Duff, Ireland (Hunt 70), Doyle (Long 74).
Slovakia: Contofalsky - Singlar (Sestak 79), Skrtel, Klimpl, Gresko, Borbely, Zofcak, Sapara (Holosko 72), Svento (Michalik 87), Vittek, Jakubko.

Mar 28 - Cardiff
Wales 3 (Giggs 3, Bale 20, Koumas pen 62)
San Marino 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 18,752. **Ref:** Tchagharyan (Arm)
Wales: Coyne - Bale, J Collins, Evans (Nyatanga 63), Ricketts, S Davies, Fletcher, Giggs (Parry 73), Koumas, Bellamy, Easter (Cotterill 46).
San Marino: A Simoncini - Albani, Andreini, S Bacciocchi, C Valentini (Toccaceli 85), M Domeniconi (Bugli 67), A Gasperoni, Muccioli, Negri (F Nanni 79), Manuele Marani, Selva.

GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	5	4	1	0	21	3	13
Czech Rep	6	4	1	1	15	4	13
Rep Ireland	7	4	1	2	12	8	13
Slovakia	6	3	0	3	15	11	9
Wales	5	2	0	3	8	9	6
Cyprus	6	1	1	4	9	16	4
San Marino	5	0	0	5	1	30	0

02.09.06 Czech Republic-Wales 2-1
02.09.06 Germany-Rep Ireland..... 1-0
02.09.06 Slovakia-Cyprus..... 6-1
06.09.06 San Marino-Germany..... 0-13
06.09.06 Slovakia-Czech Republic 0-3
07.10.06 Cyprus-Rep Ireland 5-2
07.10.06 Czech Republic-San Marino 7-0
07.10.06 Wales-Slovakia 1-5
11.10.06 Rep Ireland-Czech Republic..... 1-1
11.10.06 Slovakia-Germany 1-4
11.10.06 Wales-Cyprus..... 3-1
15.11.06 Cyprus-Germany..... 1-1
15.11.06 Rep Ireland-San Marino..... 5-0
07.02.07 San Marino-Rep Ireland..... 1-2
24.03.07 Cyprus-Slovakia..... 1-3
24.03.07 Czech Republic-Germany 1-2
24.03.07 Rep Ireland-Wales 1-0
28.03.07 Czech Republic-Cyprus..... 1-0
28.03.07 Rep Ireland-Slovakia..... 1-0
28.03.07 Wales-San Marino 3-0
02.06.07 Germany-San Marino
02.06.07 Wales-Czech Republic
06.06.07 Germany-Slovakia
22.08.07 San Marino-Cyprus
08.09.07 San Marino-Czech Republic
08.09.07 Slovakia-Rep Ireland
08.09.07 Wales-Germany
12.09.07 Cyprus-San Marino
12.09.07 Czech Republic-Rep Ireland
12.09.07 Slovakia-Wales
13.10.07 Cyprus-Wales
13.10.07 Rep Ireland-Germany
13.10.07 Slovakia-San Marino
17.10.07 Germany-Czech Republic
17.10.07 Rep Ireland-Cyprus
17.10.07 San Marino-Wales
17.11.07 Czech Republic-Slovakia
17.11.07 Germany-Cyprus
17.11.07 Wales-Rep Ireland
21.11.07 Cyprus-Czech Republic
21.11.07 Germany-Wales
21.11.07 San Marino-Slovakia

Group E

Mar 24 - Zagreb
Croatia 2 (Srna 58, Eduardo 88)
Macedonia 1 (Sedloski 36)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Plautz (Aut)
Croatia: Pletikosa - Corluka, Simic, Simunic, Babic, Rapajic (Srna 46), N Kovac, Modric, Kranjcar, Eduardo, Balaban (Budan 80).
Macedonia: Nikoloski - Vasoski, Sedloski, Noveski, Popov, Sumulikoski, A Mitreski (Jancevski 78), Lazarevski, Pandev, Maznov (Vajs 72), Naumoski (Tasevski 60). Sent off: Sedloski 68min.

Mar 24 - Tallinn
Estonia 0
Russia 2 (Kerzhakov 67, 78)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 11,000. **Ref:** Ceferin (Sln)
Estonia: Poom - Shishov (Neemelo 79), Lemsalu, Stepanov, Kruglov, Dmitrijev, Terehhov (Kams 52), Leetma (Kink 69), Oper, Lindpere, Klavan.
Russia: Akinfeev - Sishkin, Ignashevich, Torbinskiy, Arshavin, Bilyaletdinov, Zyryanov, Zhirkov, Anyukov, V Bystrov (Saenko 90), Kerzhakov (Sychev 84).

Mar 24 - Tel Aviv
Israel 0
England 0
Att: 35,000. **Ref:** Ovrebo (Nor)
Israel: Awat - Ben Haim, Shpungin, Gershon, Ziv, Benado, Badir, Benayoun, Ben Shushan (Alberman 87), Tamuz (Barda 77), Balili (Sahar 70).
England: Robinson - P Neville (Richards 73), Ferdinand, Terry, Carragher, Gerrard, Hargreaves, Lampard, Lennon (Downing 83), Rooney, Johnson (Defoe 80).

Mar 28 - Barcelona
Andorra 0
England 3 (Gerrard 54, 77, Nugent 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 12,800. **Ref:** Duarte Paixao (Por)
Andorra: Koldo - A Lima, Ayala, Sonejee, Escura, Garcia, Vieira, Ruiz (Fernandez 88), Pujol (Martinez 69), Bernaus, Toscano (Moreno 90).
England: Robinson - Richards (Dyer 62), Ferdinand, Terry, A Cole, Lennon, Gerrard, Hargreaves, Downing, Rooney (Defoe 62), Johnson (Nugent 79).

Mar 28 - Tel Aviv
Israel 4 (Tal 20, Colautti 31, Sahar 76, 80)
Estonia 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 23,658. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Israel: Awat - Shpungin, Ben Haim, Gershon, Ziv, Tal (Toema 88), Badir, Ben Shushan (Alberman 70), Benayoun, Tamuz (Sahar 65), Colautti.
Estonia: Poom - Shishov, Lemsalu, Barengrub, Kruglov, Dmitrijev, Oper, Rahn (Kink 40), Neemelo (Konsa 61), Lindpere (Kams 80), Klavan.

GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Croatia	5	4	1	0	15	4	13
Israel	6	3	2	1	13	6	11
Russia	5	3	2	0	7	1	11
England	6	3	2	1	9	2	11
Macedonia	6	2	1	3	5	5	7
Estonia	5	0	0	5	0	10	0
Andorra	5	0	0	5	1	22	0

16.08.06 Estonia-Macedonia..... 0-1
02.09.06 England-Andorra..... 5-0
02.09.06 Estonia-Israel..... 0-1
06.09.06 Israel-Andorra..... 4-1
06.09.06 Macedonia-England..... 0-1
06.09.06 Russia-Croatia 0-0
07.10.06 Croatia-Andorra 7-0
07.10.06 England-Macedonia..... 0-0
07.10.06 Russia-Israel..... 1-1
11.10.06 Andorra-Macedonia 0-3
11.10.06 Croatia-England..... 2-0
11.10.06 Russia-Estonia..... 2-0
15.11.06 Israel-Croatia 3-4
15.11.06 Macedonia-Russia 0-2
24.03.07 Croatia-Macedonia 2-1
24.03.07 Estonia-Russia..... 0-2
24.03.07 Israel-England..... 0-0
28.03.07 Andorra-England..... 0-3
28.03.07 Israel-Estonia..... 4-0
02.06.07 Estonia-Croatia
02.06.07 Macedonia-Israel
02.06.07 Russia-Andorra
06.06.07 Andorra-Israel
06.06.07 Croatia-Russia
06.06.07 Estonia-England
22.08.07 Estonia-Andorra
08.09.07 Croatia-Estonia
08.09.07 England-Israel
08.09.07 Russia-Macedonia
12.09.07 Andorra-Croatia
12.09.07 England-Russia
12.09.07 Macedonia-Estonia
13.10.07 England-Estonia
17.10.07 Croatia-Israel
17.10.07 Macedonia-Andorra
17.10.07 Russia-England
17.11.07 Andorra-Estonia
17.11.07 Israel-Russia
17.11.07 Macedonia-Croatia
21.11.07 Andorra-Russia
21.11.07 England-Croatia
21.11.07 Israel-Macedonia

Group F

Mar 24 - Vaduz
Liechtenstein 1 (F Burgmeier 90)
Northern Ireland 4 (Healy 52, 75, 83, McCann 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 4,340. **Ref:** Oriekhov (Ukr)
Liechtenstein: Jehle - Oehri (Telser 67), Martin Stocklasa, Ritter, Michael Stocklasa, Rohrer (S Buchel 87), R Buchel (D Frick 87), M Buchel, F Burgmeier, M Frick, T Beck.
Northern Ireland: Taylor - Duff, A Hughes, Craigan, Evans, Gillespie, Johnson, Davis, Brunt (McCann 67), Healy (Jones 84), Lafferty (Feeney 55).

Mar 24 - Madrid
Spain 2 (Morientes 34, Villa 45)
Denmark 1 (Gravgaard 48)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 75,000. **Ref:** Busacca (Swi)
Spain: Casillas - Angel, Javi Navarro, Marchena, Capdevila, Iniesta, Albelda, Xavi (Xabi Alonso 60), Silva, Morientes (Fernando Torres 64), Villa (Angulo 76).
Denmark: T Sorensen - Jacobsen, Agger, Gravgaard, N Jensen, D Jensen, Jorgensen (Andreasen 35; Bendtner 74), C Poulsen, Kahlenberg (Gronkjaer 60), Rommedahl, Tomasson. Sent off: N Jensen 20min.

Mar 28 - Vaduz
Liechtenstein 1 (M Frick 17)
Latvia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 1,680. **Ref:** Gumienny (Blg)
Liechtenstein: Jehle - Telser, Martin Stocklasa, Hasler, Michael Stocklasa, M Buchel, R Buchel, F Burgmeier, M Frick, T Beck (Fischer 76), Rohrer (S Buchel 90).
Latvia: Kolinko - Kacanovs, Gorkss (Prohorenkovs 79), Stepanovs, Klava, Bleidelis, Morozs (Pereplotkins 61), Laizans, Visnakovs, Pahars, Verpakovskis (Karlsons 46).

Mar 28 - Belfast
Northern Ireland 2 (Healy 31, 59)
Sweden 1 (Elmander 25)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 14,500. **Ref:** Bramhaar (Hol)
Northern Ireland: Taylor - Duff, Craigan, A Hughes, Evans, Johnson (Sproule 90), Davis, McCann, Brunt, Healy (Webb 90), Feeney (Lafferty 80).
Sweden: Isaksson - M Nilsson, Mellberg (Majstorovic 70), P Hansson, Edman, D Andersson, Alexandersson (Wilhelmsson 61), A Svensson (Kallstrom 46), Ljungberg, Ibrahimovic, Elmander.

Mar 28 - Palma de Mallorca
Spain 1 (Iniesta 81)
Iceland 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 18,000. **Ref:** Duhamel (Fra)
Spain: Casillas - Sergio Ramos, Puyol, Marchena, Capdevila (Angulo 46), Albelda (Xabi Alonso 78), Iniesta, Xavi, Silva, Morientes (Fernando Torres 42), Villa.
Iceland: Arason - K Sigurdsson, O Bjarnason, Ingimarsson, G Gunnarsson, Steinsson, B Gunnarsson, Vidarsson (H Sigurdsson 83), Hallfredsson (I Sigurdsson 75), V Gunnarsson (Gislason 55), Gudjohnsen.

GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
N Ireland	6	4	1	1	10	7	13
Sweden	5	4	0	1	9	4	12
Spain	5	3	0	2	9	6	9
Denmark	4	2	1	1	7	2	7
Latvia	4	1	0	3	4	3	3
Liechtenstein	5	1	0	4	3	15	3
Iceland	5	1	0	4	4	9	3

02.09.06 Latvia-Sweden..... 0-1
02.09.06 Northern Ireland-Iceland..... 0-3
02.09.06 Spain-Liechtenstein..... 4-0
06.09.06 Iceland-Denmark 0-2
06.09.06 Northern Ireland-Spain 3-2
06.09.06 Sweden-Liechtenstein 3-1
07.10.06 Denmark-Northern Ireland..... 0-0
07.10.06 Latvia-Iceland 4-0
07.10.06 Sweden-Spain 2-0
11.10.06 Iceland-Sweden..... 1-2
11.10.06 Liechtenstein-Denmark 0-4
11.10.06 Northern Ireland-Latvia..... 1-0
24.03.07 Liechtenstein-N Ireland 1-4
24.03.07 Spain-Denmark..... 2-1
28.03.07 Liechtenstein-Latvia 1-0
28.03.07 Northern Ireland-Sweden 2-1
28.03.07 Spain-Iceland..... 1-0
02.06.07 Denmark-Sweden
02.06.07 Iceland-Liechtenstein
02.06.07 Latvia-Spain
06.06.07 Latvia-Denmark
06.06.07 Liechtenstein-Spain
06.06.07 Sweden-Iceland
22.08.07 N Ireland-Liechtenstein
08.09.07 Iceland-Spain
08.09.07 Latvia-Northern Ireland
08.09.07 Sweden-Denmark
12.09.07 Denmark-Liechtenstein
12.09.07 Iceland-Northern Ireland
12.09.07 Spain-Latvia
13.10.07 Denmark-Spain
13.10.07 Iceland-Latvia
13.10.07 Liechtenstein-Sweden
17.10.07 Denmark-Latvia
17.10.07 Liechtenstein-Iceland
17.10.07 Sweden-Northern Ireland
17.11.07 Latvia-Liechtenstein
17.11.07 Northern Ireland-Denmark
17.11.07 Spain-Sweden
21.11.07 Denmark-Iceland
21.11.07 Spain-Northern Ireland
21.11.07 Sweden-Latvia

Group G

Mar 24 - Shkoder
Albania 0
Slovenia 0
Att: 20,000. **Ref:** Attard (Mlt)
Albania: Beqaj - Dallku, E Beqiri, Dede, Cana, Haxhi, Lala, Duro, Mukaj (Berisha 86), Kapllani (Bushaj 58), Bogdani (Salihi 89).
Slovenia: Handanovic - M Mavric, Jokic, Cesar, Ilic, Koren, Zlogar, Komac (Cipot 90), Ceh (Acimovic 80), Lavric, Rakovic (Birsa 63).

Mar 24 - Rotterdam
Holland 0
Romania 0
Att: 49,000. **Ref:** Merk (Ger)
Holland: Stekelenburg - Jaliens, Mathijsen, Bouma, Van Bronckhorst, Sneijder, Landzaat (Emanuelson 79), Van der Vaart (Seedorf 86), Robben, Huntelaar, Babel.
Romania: Lobont - Contra, Tamas, Goian, Rat (Radu 78), Radoi, Codrea (Rosu 87), Nicolita, Cocis, Mutu, Marica (D Niculae 64).

Mar 24 - Luxembourg
Luxembourg 1 (Sagramola 68)
Belarus 2 (Kalachev 25, Kutuzov 54)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 2,000. **Ref:** Whitby (Wal)
Luxembourg: Joubert - Strasser, Hoffmann, Reiter, Kintziger, Peters, Bettmer, Payal (Ferreira 67), Lombardelli (Bigard 58), Remy, Collette (Sagramola 64).
Belarus: Zhevnov - Yurevich, Shtanyuk, Kulchy, Korytko, Strakhnovich (Chelyadinski 58), A Hleb, Kalachev, V Hleb, Kornilenko (Bliznyuk 74), Kutuzov (Radkov 80).

Mar 28 - Sofia
Bulgaria 0
Albania 0
Att: 25,000. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Bulgaria: Ivankov - Tunchev, Lucio Wagner, Tomasic, Kishishev, Yankov, Jankovic (S Todorov 46), S Petrov, Peev (Bozhinov 69), Yovov (Telkiyski 46), Berbatov.
Albania: Beqaj - Dallku, Haxhi (Kapllani 54), E Beqiri, Dede, Curri, Cana, Lala, Duro (Bulku 69), Berisha (Bushi 79), Bogdani.

Mar 28 - Piatra Neamt
Romania 3 (Mutu 25, Contra 50, Marica 90)
Luxembourg 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 9,012. **Ref:** Lajuks (Lat)
Romania: Lobont - Contra, Tamas (Stoica 87), Goian, Radu, Cocis, Radoi, Rosu (Cristea 52), Zicu, D Niculae (Marica 66), Mutu.
Luxembourg: Joubert - Bigard, Hoffmann, Reiter, Strasser, Lombardelli (Ferreira 82), Peters, Bettmer (Payal 46), Mutsch, Remy, Collette (Sagramola 46).

Mar 28 - Celje
Slovenia 0
Holland 1 (Van Bronckhorst 86)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 9,520. **Ref:** Mejuto Gonzalez (Spa)
Slovenia: S Handanovic - Ilic, Jokic, M Mavric, Cesar, Ceh, Komac, Koren, Acimovic (Sukalo 61), Lavric (Birsa 83), Rakovic (Novakovic 65).
Holland: Van der Sar - Heitinga (De Zeeuw 74), Mathijsen, Bouma, Van Bronckhorst, Emanuelson, Sneijder, Afellay (Seedorf 85), Babel (Koevermans 73), Kuijt, Robben.

GROUP G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	6	4	2	0	8	2	14
Romania	5	3	2	0	10	3	11
Bulgaria	5	2	3	0	7	3	9
Belarus	5	2	1	2	9	11	7
Slovenia	5	1	1	3	4	8	4
Albania	5	0	3	2	3	6	3
Luxembourg	5	0	0	5	1	9	0

02.09.06 Belarus-Albania 2-2
02.09.06 Luxembourg-Holland 0-1
02.09.06 Romania-Bulgaria 2-2
06.09.06 Albania-Romania 0-2
06.09.06 Bulgaria-Slovenia 3-0
06.09.06 Holland-Belarus 3-0
07.10.06 Bulgaria-Holland 1-1
07.10.06 Romania-Belarus 3-1
07.10.06 Slovenia-Luxembourg 2-0
11.10.06 Belarus-Slovenia 4-2
11.10.06 Holland-Albania 2-1
11.10.06 Luxembourg-Bulgaria 0-1
24.03.07 Albania-Slovenia 0-0
24.03.07 Holland-Romania 0-0
24.03.07 Luxembourg-Belarus 1-2
28.03.07 Bulgaria-Albania 0-0
28.03.07 Romania-Luxembourg 3-0
28.03.07 Slovenia-Holland 0-1
02.06.07 Albania-Luxembourg
02.06.07 Belarus-Bulgaria
02.06.07 Slovenia-Romania
06.06.07 Bulgaria-Belarus
06.06.07 Luxembourg-Albania
06.06.07 Romania-Slovenia
08.09.07 Belarus-Romania
08.09.07 Holland-Bulgaria
08.09.07 Luxembourg-Slovenia
12.09.07 Albania-Holland
12.09.07 Bulgaria-Luxembourg
12.09.07 Slovenia-Belarus
13.10.07 Belarus-Luxembourg
13.10.07 Romania-Holland
13.10.07 Slovenia-Albania
17.10.07 Albania-Bulgaria
17.10.07 Holland-Slovenia
17.10.07 Luxembourg-Romania
17.11.07 Albania-Belarus
17.11.07 Bulgaria-Romania
17.11.07 Holland-Luxembourg
21.11.07 Belarus-Holland
21.11.07 Romania-Albania
21.11.07 Slovenia-Bulgaria

Top two in each group qualify for finals. Austria and Switzerland qualify automatically as co-hosts. Finals tournament: June 7-29, 2008

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALIFIERS

Group 1

Mar 25 - Antananarivo
Madagascar 0
Ivory Coast 3 (Gohouri 28, Dindane 35, Diane 81)
HT: 0-2
Ivory Coast: Barry - Akale (Diane 46), Boka, K Toure (Bah 87), Gohouri, Tiene, Yapi Yapo, N'Dri, Dindane, Drogba, S Kalou.

GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	2	2	0	0	8	0	6
Gabon	2	1	0	1	4	5	3
Madagascar	2	0	0	2	0	7	0

Djibouti withdrew

02.09.06 Gabon-Madagascar 4-0
08.10.06 Ivory Coast-Gabon 5-0
25.03.07 Madagascar-Ivory Coast 0-3
02.06.07 Ivory Coast-Madagascar
16.06.07 Madagascar-Gabon
08.09.07 Gabon-Ivory Coast

Group 2

Mar 25 - Gaborone
Botswana 1 (Siska 57)
Burundi 0
HT: 0-0

Mar 25 - Cairo
Egypt 3 (Zidan 12, Sidibe og 23, Ghaly 66)
Mauritania 0
HT: 2-0
Egypt: El-Hadary (Abdelwahed El-Sayed) - Fathi (Gamal), H Said, Shady Mohamed, Meawwad, Ghaly, Shawki, Abd Rabbou, A Hassan (I Said), Zidan, Moteab.

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	3	2	1	0	7	1	7
Botswana	3	1	1	1	1	4	4
Mauritania	3	1	0	2	5	6	3
Burundi	3	1	0	2	4	6	3

02.09.06 Egypt-Burundi 4-1
02.09.06 Mauritania-Botswana 4-0
07.10.06 Botswana-Egypt 0-0
08.10.06 Burundi-Mauritania 3-1
25.03.07 Botswana-Burundi 1-0
25.03.07 Egypt-Mauritania 3-0
02.06.07 Burundi-Botswana
02.06.07 Mauritania-Egypt
16.06.07 Botswana-Mauritania
16.06.07 Burundi-Egypt
08.09.07 Egypt-Botswana
08.09.07 Mauritania-Burundi

Group 3

Mar 24 - Abeokuta
Nigeria 1 (Kanu 73)
Uganda 0
HT: 0-0

Mar 25 - Maseru
Lesotho 3 (Potse 22, 44, Marai 75)
Niger 1 (Daouda 80)
HT: 2-0

GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	3	3	0	0	4	0	9
Uganda	3	1	1	1	3	1	4
Lesotho	3	1	0	2	3	5	3
Niger	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

02.09.06 Nigeria-Niger 2-0
02.09.06 Uganda-Lesotho 3-0
08.10.06 Lesotho-Nigeria 0-1
08.10.06 Niger-Uganda 0-0
24.03.07 Nigeria-Uganda 1-0
25.03.07 Lesotho-Niger 3-1
02.06.07 Niger-Lesotho
02.06.07 Uganda-Nigeria
16.06.07 Lesotho-Uganda
16.06.07 Niger-Nigeria
08.09.07 Nigeria-Lesotho
08.09.07 Uganda-Niger

Group 4

Mar 24 - Victoria
Seychelles 0
Tunisia 3 (Jemaa 16, 76, 80)
HT: 0-1
Tunisia: Kasraoui - Jemmali, Jaidi, Hagui, El-Bekri, Ragued (Ouertani 46), Chedli, Benachour, Nafti (Namouchi 65), Gmamdia (Ben Zekri 80), Jemaa.

Mar 25 - Curepipe
Mauritius 1 (Naboth 61)
Sudan 2 (Sido 42, 76)
HT: 0-1

GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	3	2	1	0	4	0	7
Sudan	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Seychelles	3	1	0	2	2	7	3
Mauritius	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

03.09.06 Mauritius-Tunisia 0-0
03.09.06 Sudan-Seychelles 3-0
07.10.06 Seychelles-Mauritius 2-1
07.10.06 Tunisia-Sudan 1-0
24.03.07 Seychelles-Tunisia 0-3
25.03.07 Mauritius-Sudan 1-2
02.06.07 Sudan-Mauritius
02.06.07 Tunisia-Seychelles
16.06.07 Seychelles-Sudan
16.06.07 Tunisia-Mauritius
08.09.07 Mauritius-Seychelles
08.09.07 Sudan-Tunisia

Group 5

Mar 24 - Yaounde
Cameroon 3 (Webo 16, 25, Idrissou 87)
Liberia 1 (Doe 26)
HT: 2-1
Sent off: Gebro (Liberia) 61min
Cameroon: Kameni - Geremi, Song, Ngom Kome, Mbia, Atouba, Matoukou, Emana (Nguemo 47), Olembe (Idrissou 54), Webo, Eto'o (Wamfor 60).

Mar 25 - Malabo
Equatorial Guinea 3 (Anderson 10, Rondo pen 25, Epitie 83)
Rwanda 1 (Karekezi 17)
HT: 2-1

GROUP 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon	3	3	0	0	9	1	9
Eq Guinea	3	2	0	1	5	5	6
Liberia	3	1	0	2	5	7	3
Rwanda	3	0	0	3	3	9	0

03.09.06 Equatorial Guinea-Liberia 2-1
03.09.06 Rwanda-Cameroon 0-3
07.10.06 Cameroon-Equatorial Guinea 3-0
08.10.06 Liberia-Rwanda 3-2
24.03.07 Cameroon-Liberia 3-1
25.03.07 Equatorial Guinea-Rwanda 3-1
02.06.07 Liberia-Cameroon
02.06.07 Rwanda-Equatorial Guinea
16.06.07 Cameroon-Rwanda
16.06.07 Liberia-Equatorial Guinea
08.09.07 Equatorial Guinea-Cameroon
08.09.07 Rwanda-Liberia

Group 6

Mar 25 - Luanda
Angola 6 (Flavio 26, 69, Mantorras pen 35, Ze Kalanga 41, Mendonca 51, Figueiredo 85)
Eritrea 1 (Shimongwe 62)
HT: 3-0
Angola: Lama - Loco, Kali, Jamba, Yamba Asha, Mendonca, Chara, Figueiredo, Ze Kalanga (Edson Nobre), Flavio (Manucho Goncalves), Mantorras (Titi Buengo).

Mar 25 - Nairobi
Kenya 2 (Mariga 53, Oboya 76)
Swaziland 0
HT: 0-0

GROUP 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Angola	3	3	0	0	11	2	9
Eritrea	3	1	1	1	3	7	4
Kenya	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Swaziland	3	0	1	2	0	4	1

02.09.06 Kenya-Eritrea 1-2
03.09.06 Swaziland-Angola 0-2
08.10.06 Angola-Kenya 3-1
08.10.06 Eritrea-Swaziland 0-0
25.03.07 Angola-Eritrea 6-1
25.03.07 Kenya-Swaziland 2-0
02.06.07 Eritrea-Angola
02.06.07 Swaziland-Kenya
16.06.07 Angola-Swaziland
16.06.07 Eritrea-Kenya
08.09.07 Kenya-Angola
08.09.07 Swaziland-Eritrea

Group 7

Mar 24 - Ouagadougou
Burkina Faso 1 (Pitroipa 26)
Mozambique 1 (Carlitos 2)
HT: 1-1

Mar 24 - Dakar
Senegal 4 (Niang 39, 48, 63, Kamara 46)
Tanzania 0
HT: 1-0
Senegal: Sylva - Ndaw, Diatta, Diagne Faye, P Mendy, Sall (I Faye 78), N'Doye, F Mendy, E H Diouf (Toure 84), Kamara, Niang (H Camara 70).

GROUP 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal	3	2	0	1	6	1	6
Burkina Faso	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Tanzania	3	1	1	1	2	5	4
Mozambique	3	0	2	1	1	3	2

02.09.06 Senegal-Mozambique 2-0
02.09.06 Tanzania-Burkina Faso 2-1
07.10.06 Burkina Faso-Senegal 1-0
08.10.06 Mozambique-Tanzania 0-0
24.03.07 Burkina Faso-Mozambique 1-1
24.03.07 Senegal-Tanzania 4-0
02.06.07 Mozambique-Burkina Faso
02.06.07 Tanzania-Senegal
16.06.07 Burkina Faso-Tanzania
16.06.07 Mozambique-Senegal
08.09.07 Senegal-Burkina Faso
08.09.07 Tanzania-Mozambique

Group 8

Mar 24 - Algiers
Algeria 2 (Daham 60, Meniri 89)
Cape Verde Islands 0
HT: 0-0
Algeria: Gaouaoui - Bouzid, Bougherra, Meniri, Zarabi, Ziani, Mansouri, Belhadj, Bouazza (Amroune 88), Saifi (Younes 90), Daham (Matmour 73).

Mar 24 - Bakau
Gambia 0
Guinea 2 (Diawara 47, Feindouno 74)
HT: 0-0

GROUP 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	3	2	1	0	3	0	7
Guinea	3	1	1	1	2	1	4
Gambia	3	1	0	2	2	3	3
Cape Verde Is	3	1	0	2	1	4	3

03.09.06 Gambia-Cape Verde Islands 2-0
03.09.06 Guinea-Algeria 0-0
07.10.06 Algeria-Gambia 1-0
08.10.06 Cape Verde Islands-Guinea 1-0
24.03.07 Algeria-Cape Verde Islands 2-0
24.03.07 Gambia-Guinea 0-2

02.06.07 Cape Verde Islands-Algeria
02.06.07 Guinea-Gambia
16.06.07 Algeria-Guinea
16.06.07 Cape Verde Islands-Gambia
08.09.07 Gambia-Algeria
08.09.07 Guinea-Cape Verde Islands

Group 9

Mar 24 - Lome
Togo 3 (Adebayor 37, 85, Olufade 62)
Sierra Leone 1 (Wobay 72)
HT: 1-0

Mar 25 - Bamako
Mali 1 (Kanoute pen 47)
Benin 1 (Ogoubiyi 44)
HT: 0-1

GROUP 9	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Togo	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Mali	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Benin	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Sierra Leone	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

03.09.06 Sierra Leone-Mali 0-0
03.09.06 Togo-Benin 2-1
08.10.06 Benin-Sierra Leone 2-0
08.10.06 Mali-Togo 1-0
24.03.07 Togo-Sierra Leone 3-1
25.03.07 Mali-Benin 1-1
02.06.07 Benin-Mali
02.06.07 Sierra Leone-Togo
16.06.07 Benin-Togo
16.06.07 Mali-Sierra Leone
08.09.07 Sierra Leone-Benin
08.09.07 Togo-Mali

Group 10

Mar 25 - Tripoli
Libya 2 (Rewane 12, El-Taib 61)
Namibia 1 (Benjamin)

GROUP 10	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
DR Congo	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Libya	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Ethiopia	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Namibia	3	1	0	2	4	5	3

03.09.06 DR Congo-Namibia 3-2
03.09.06 Ethiopia-Libya 1-0
07.10.06 Namibia-Ethiopia 1-0
08.10.06 Libya-DR Congo 1-1
25.03.07 Libya-Namibia 2-1
tba DR Congo-Ethiopia
02.06.07 Ethiopia-DR Congo
02.06.07 Namibia-Libya
16.06.07 Libya-Ethiopia
16.06.07 Namibia-DR Congo
08.09.07 DR Congo-Libya
08.09.07 Ethiopia-Namibia

Group 11

Mar 24 - N'Djamena
Chad 0
South Africa 3 (Moriri 32, Buckley 45, Zuma 78)
HT: 0-2
South Africa: Fernandez - Nzama, A Mokoena, Morris, Thwala, Pienaar, Sibaya, Sapula (Mhlongo 79), Buckley (Van Heerden 64), Moriri (Nomvete 69), Zuma.

Mar 25 - Brazzaville
Congo 0
Zambia 0

GROUP 11	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Africa	3	2	1	0	4	0	7
Congo	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
Zambia	3	1	1	1	2	1	4
Chad	3	0	0	3	1	8	0

02.09.06 South Africa-Congo 0-0
03.09.06 Chad-Zambia 0-2
07.10.06 Congo-Chad 3-0
07.10.06 Zambia-South Africa 0-1
24.03.07 Chad-South Africa 0-3
25.03.07 Congo-Zambia 0-0
02.06.07 South Africa-Chad
02.06.07 Zambia-Congo
16.06.07 Congo-South Africa
16.06.07 Zambia-Chad
08.09.07 Chad-Congo
08.09.07 South Africa-Zambia

Group 12

Mar 25 - Harare
Zimbabwe 1 (Nyandoro 82)
Morocco 1 (Y Hadji 7)
HT: 0-1
Morocco: Jarmouni - Falah, El-Karkouri, Benaskar, Kaddouri (Rbati 17), Yaacoubi (Ramzi 55), El-Assas, Safri, Y Hadji, Boukhari, Lembarki (Ouaddouch 85).

GROUP 12	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Malawi	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Zimbabwe	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

02.09.06 Morocco-Malawi 2-0
07.10.06 Malawi-Zimbabwe 1-0
25.03.07 Zimbabwe-Morocco 1-1
02.06.07 Morocco-Zimbabwe
16.06.07 Malawi-Morocco
08.09.07 Zimbabwe-Malawi

Group winners and the three best runners-up qualify for finals. Ghana qualify automatically as hosts. Finals tournament: January 20-February 10, 2008

CEMAC CUP

(Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa)

In N'Djamena, Chad

Group A

Mar 4
Chad 2
Cameroon amateur XI 1
HT: 2-0

Mar 6
Chad 3
Central African Republic 2

Mar 8
Cameroon amateur XI 0
Central African Republic 0

GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chad	2	2	0	0	5	3	6
Cent Af Rep	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Cameroon amat.	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

Group B

Mar 5
Congo 2
Equatorial Guinea 1

Mar 7
Congo 2
Gabon 2
HT: 2-0

Mar 9
Gabon 1
Equatorial Guinea 1

GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Congo	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Gabon	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Eq Guinea	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

Semi-finals

Mar 11
Chad 0
Gabon 2

Mar 12
Congo 4
Central African Republic 1
HT: 2-1

Third-place play-off

Mar 16
Chad 1
Central African Republic 0

Final

Mar 16
Gabon 0
Congo 1

ALMA TV CUP

In Shymkent, Kazakhstan

Mar 7
Uzbekistan 0
Azerbaijan 1 (Subasic 55)
HT: 0-0

Mar 7
Kazakhstan 2 (Byakov 3, Chichulin 68)
Kyrgyzstan 0
HT: 1-0

Mar 9
Kyrgyzstan 0
Uzbekistan 6 (Soliev 2, Bakaev pen 7, 43, 89, Mandzukas 63, Shishelov 80)
HT: 0-3

Mar 9
Azerbaijan 0
Kazakhstan 1 (Finonchenko 80)
HT: 0-0

Mar 11
Azerbaijan 1 (Dzavadov 17)
Kyrgyzstan 0
HT: 1-0
Sent off: Kydyraliev (Kyrgyzstan) 65min

Mar 11
Kazakhstan 1 (Suyumagambetov 13)
Uzbekistan 1 (Genyrikh 34)
HT: 1-1
Sent off: Soliev (Uzbekistan) 88min

ALMA TV CUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kazakhstan	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Azerbaijan	3	2	0	1	2	1	6
Uzbekistan	3	1	1	1	7	2	4
Kyrgyzstan	3	0	0	3	0	9	0

FRIENDLIES

Sunday, March 18

Mar 18 - Labomba
Swaziland 0
Lesotho 1 (Potse 75)
HT: 0-0

Tuesday, March 20

Mar 20 - Tripoli
Libya 0
Mauritania 0

Wednesday, March 21

Mar 21 - Belle Vue
Mauritius 0
Ivory Coast 3 (S Kalou 60, Gohouri 76, 90)
HT: 0-0

Thursday, March 22

Mar 22 - Fort Lauderdale, USA
Jamaica 0
Switzerland 2 (Streller 7, Inler 12)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 3,254. **Ref:** Brus (USA)
Jamaica: McCallum - Smith (A Reid 46), Harvey, J Taylor, Swaby, Palmer (Harrison 77), Finlayson (Moodie 46), Stewart (F Davis 46), Phillips, F Taylor, Bryan (D Davis 68).
Switzerland: Coltorti - P Degen (Lichtsteiner 79), Muller (Djourou 46), Senderos, Magnin (Spycher 46), Barnetta (Behrami 46), Dzemaili, Margairaz, Inler, Frei, Streller (Vonlanthen 46; Yakin 57).

Saturday, March 24

Mar 24 - Graz
Austria 1 (Aufhauser 55)
Ghana 1 (Muntari 87)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,608. **Ref:** Verbist (Blg)
Austria: Manninger - Standfest, Stranzl (Hiden 46), Feldhofer, Fuchs, Aufhauser, Prager, Leitgeb, Ivanschitz (Sariyar 75), Linz (Kavlak 72), Kuljic (Haas 57).
Ghana: Adjei (R Kingston 41) - Paintsil, Dickoh, J Mensah, Sarpei, Boateng (A Mensah 65), E Addo, L Kingston, Muntari, Dramani (Helegbe 81), Gyan (Ofori-Quaye 46).

Mar 24 - Gothenburg, Sweden
Brazil 4 (Ronaldinho pen 16, 50, Kaka 31, Juan 59)
Chile 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Berntsen (Nor)
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Daniel Alves, Lucio, Juan, Gilberto, Gilberto Silva (Dudu Cearense 77), Elano (Mineiro 46), Kaka (Diego 79), Ronaldinho, Robinho, Fred (Vagner Love 77).
Chile: Bravo - Von Schwedler (Navia 46), J Vargas, I Fuentes, Figueroa, Maldonado, Sanhueza, M Gonzalez (Iturra 78), Fernandez (Valdivia 46), Jimenez (Tello 78), Suazo.

Mar 24 - Guangzhou
China 0
Australia 2 (Holman 8, Bresciano 27)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Wu (HK)
China: Li Leilei - Sun Jihai, Du Wei, Xu Yunlong, Cao Yang, Du Zhenyu (Dong Fangzhuo 37), Zhao Junzhe (Zhou Haibin 46), Mao Jianqing (Yan Song 75), Zheng Zhi, Shao Jiayi (Han Peng 57), Li Jinyu (Wang Dong 83).
Australia: Schwarzer - Neill, Wilkshire, Steffanuto (North 66), Beauchamp, Kisnorbo, Bresciano (Carle 80), Valeri (Burns 90), Holman (Thompson 69), Sterjovski (Colosimo 85), Viduka (McDonald 76).

Mar 24 - San Jose
Costa Rica 4 (Saborio 7, pen 78, A Solis 18, Ruiz 57)
New Zealand 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Rodriguez (CR)
Costa Rica: Lewis - V Cordero, Chinchilla, Nunez, Umana, Miller (L Gonzalez 68), Barrantes (Centeno 58), Rodriguez, A Solis (R Fonseca 66), Ruiz, Saborio (Gabriels 80).
New Zealand: Paston - Bunce, Hay, Lochhead, Old, Bertos, Brown (Christie 85), Hickey, Vicelich, Brockie (James 54), Smeltz.

Mar 24 - Gosier
Guadeloupe 2 (Bematol 16, 41)
Trinidad & Tobago 2 (C Baptiste 47, Toussaint 62)
HT: 2-0
Guadeloupe: Fausta - Delannay (Baltyde 65), Vertot, Hanany (E Mocka 85), Bematol, Gotin, Bizacene (Theresine 75), Laurent (Fiston 46), Lambourde, Angloma, Onesta.
Trinidad & Tobago: Phillip - Jack, Power, Daniel, C Baptiste, Noel, Nickelson, K Baptiste (Spann 81), Aguillera, Toussaint, Glasgow (Clarence 64).

Mar 24 - Miami, USA
Haiti 3 (Cadet 28, Brunel 53, Saint-Jean 86)
Panama 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 12,000

Mar 24 - Fort Lauderdale, USA
Honduras 2 (Oliva 26, 66)
El Salvador 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 17,095. **Ref:** Marrufo (USA)
Honduras: N Valladares - Garcia, Figueroa, S Caballero, Guerrero (E Izaguirre 81), W Palacios (W Martinez 46), Oliva, Claros, Guevara (M Valladares 46), E Martinez (Castro 71), D Suazo (Jairo Martinez 85).
El Salvador: Gomez - Salazar, Henriquez, Escobar, Carballo, Alas (W Torres 75), Menjivar, Sanchez (Jose Martinez 53), Cerritos, Quintanilla, Campos.

Mar 24 - Yokohama
Japan 2 (Maki 19, Takahara 54)
Peru 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 60,400. **Ref:** Nardi (Aus)
Japan: Kawaguchi - Nakazawa, Tulio Tanaka, Abe (K Nakamura 60), S Nakamura (Fujimoto 85), Kaji, Endo (Hanyu 68), K Suzuki (Ienaga 85), Komano, Takahara (Mizuno 85), Maki (Yano 68).
Peru: Flores (Forsyth 46) - Hidalgo, Vilchez, De la Haza, Alvarado, Bazalar (Torres 69), Marino, Sanchez, Cespedes, Jimenez (Mostto 68), Herrera.

Mar 24 - Podgorica
Montenegro 2 (Vucinic pen 65, Burzanovic pen 82)
Hungary 1 (Priskin 1)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Kranjc (Sln)
Montenegro: Poleksic - Pavicevic (Lakic 90), Batak, Tanasijevic (Jeknic 84), Jovanovic, Raicevic (Tumbasevic 57), Boskovic, Vukcevic, Burzanovic (V Vujovic 87), Bozovic (Purovic 46), Vucinic (Jovetic 84).
Hungary: Vegh (Fulop 46) - Csizmadia, Vasko, Balogh, Bodor, B Toth, Vadocz (Farkas 84), Tozser, Hajnal, Rajczi (Huszti 53), Priskin.

Mar 24 - Al Gharaffah
Qatar 0
Iran 1 (Vahedi-Nikbakht 7)
HT: 0-1

Mar 24 - Seoul
South Korea 0
Uruguay 2 (Bueno 19, 37)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 42,159. **Ref:** Ogiya (Jap)
South Korea: Kim Yong-dae - Kim Dong-jin, Kim Sang-sik, Oh Beom-seok, Lee Young-pyo (Kim Chi-woo 46), Kim Jung-woo, Lee Ho, Lee Chun-soo, Park Ji-sung (Kim Do-heon 46), Seol Ki-hyeon, Cho Jae-jin (Jung Jo-gook 70).
Uruguay: Carini - Lugano, Dario Rodriguez, Fucile (Lima 73), Diogo, Garcia (Gargano 83), Perez, Recoba (Grosmuller 89), Estoyanoff (Vargas 72), Canobbio (Arevalo Rios 64), Bueno (Vigneri 86).

Mar 24 - Colombo
Sri Lanka 1 (Weerarathne 75)
Malaysia 4 (Mohammed Hardi 5, Mohammed Fadzli 12, Azlan 44, Norhafiz 62)
HT: 0-3

Mar 24 - Taipei
Taiwan 0
Uzbekistan 1 (Khoshimov 53)
HT: 0-0

Mar 24 - Merida
Venezuela 3 (Arango 11, Torrealba 33, C Gonzalez 64)
Cuba 1 (Alcantara 47)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Andarcia (Ven)
Venezuela: Vega (Toyo 46) - H Gonzalez, Rey, Rouga (A Cichero 46), Rojas, Edder Perez (Meza 46), L Vera (Vielma 58), Guerra (C Gonzalez 46), Arango, Maldonado (Fedor 52), Torrealba (Moran 46). Sent off: H Gonzalez 68min.
Cuba: O Molina - Marquez, S Pedro, Caballero, Jaime Colome, Faife, Joel Colome (Munoz 79), Alonso (Alfonso 70), A Cervantes (A Pedro 77), Duarte (More 70), Alcantara (Ramos 59).

Sunday, March 25
Mar 25 - Bridgetown
Barbados 0
Guatemala 0
Barbados: Eastmond - James, Straker, Belle, J Forde, N Forde, Goodridge (Atherly), Marshall, Lovell (McClean), Williams (Welch), R Hall.
Guatemala: Trigueno - N Martinez (Albizuriz 64), Melgar, Medina, G Cabrera, Contreras (De Mata 73), Thompson, Noriega (Quinonez 64), Figueroa (Avilla 64), Rodriguez (Villatoro 80), Pezzarossi.

Mar 25 - Hamilton
Bermuda 0
Canada 3 (Hutchinson 25, Radzinski 30, Stalteri 44)
HT: 0-3
Bermuda: Figuerido - Frick, Franks, Cox, D Zuill (Darrell 76), Samuels, Astwood (Hollis 76), Hill (Scott 60), Crockwell (Dill 70), Keith Jennings, R Bean (Place 85).
Canada: Hirschfeld - Hastings, McKenna, Hainault, Stalteri (Braz 80), De Rosario, Hutchinson (Nakajima-Farran 70), Nash (Simpson 55), De Guzman (Harmse 75), Radzinski, Occean (Friend 55).

Mar 25 - Miami, USA
Colombia 3 (E Perea 5, Viafara 56, Chitiva 85)
Switzerland 1 (Frei pen 39)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 16,000. **Ref:** Vaughn (USA)
Colombia: Calero - Cordoba, Mosquera, L Perea, Arizala, Viafara, Vargas (Banguero 78), Dominguez (Torres 85), Ferreira (Castrillon 70), E Perea (Chitiva 68), Rey (Rodallega 53).
Switzerland: Zuberbuhler - Behrami (Lichtsteiner 46), Djourou, Senderos, Magnin (Regazzoni 73), Barnetta, H Yakin (D Degen 79), Cabanas, Inler (Streller 46), Vonlanthen (Spycher 46), Frei (Muller 66).

Mar 25 - Monterrey
Mexico 2 (Borgetti 77, 81)
Paraguay 1 (Santa Cruz 89)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pineda (Hnd)
Mexico: Ochoa - Osorio (J A Castro 89), Magallon, Marquez, R Morales (O Rojas 77), Torrado, A Medina (Arce 71), Pineda, Bravo (Borgetti 77), Guardado (G Galindo 85), Fonseca (Bautista 46).
Paraguay: Villar - Vera, J C Caceres, Veron (Caniza 72), Da Silva, Paredes (Bonet 71), E Gonzalez, Montiel (Riveros 65), Torres, Cabanas (Gimenez 76), Santa Cruz. Sent off: Gimenez 83min.

Mar 25 - Tampa
United States 3 (Donovan 1, 66, 67)
Ecuador 1 (F Caicedo 11)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 31,547. **Ref:** Petrescu (Can)
United States: Howard - Bocanegra, Cherundolo (Spector 80), Conrad, Onyewu, Dempsey (Mullan 80), Feilhaber, Beasley (Mapp 83), Donovan (Carroll 90), Johnson (Bradley 46), Ching (Twellman 73).
Ecuador: Aragon - Hurtado (Guagua 78), De la Cruz, G Espinoza, Reasco (Bagui 90), Mendez, Castillo, Valencia, L Caicedo (Saritama 64), F Caicedo (Zura 72), C Tenorio (Borja 78).

Monday, March 26
Mar 26 - Kingston
Jamaica 1 (Shelton 45)
Panama 1 (Garces 4)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Brizan (T&T)
Jamaica: Whittaker - J Taylor, Phillips, Harvey, Swaby (A Reid 90), Stewart (Moodie 76), Finlayson (F Davis 65), Palmer (Bryan 83), F Taylor (Redwood 86), Shelton, Gardner.
Panama: Calderon - Anthony, A Henriquez, Anderson, Moreno, J Perez, Solis (Solanilla 73), Gomez (Gallardo 46), Phillips (Arosemena 85), Garces (Aguilar 46), B Perez (Escobar 46).

Mar 26 - Colombo
Sri Lanka 2 (Fauzan 47, Lathif Mohamed 55)
Malaysia 1 (Mohammed Hardi 16)
HT: 0-1

Tuesday, March 27
Mar 27 - Stockholm
Brazil 1 (Vagner Love 17)
Ghana 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Frojdfeldt (Swe)
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Ilsinho (Daniel Alves 60; Dudu Cearense 80), Lucio, Juan, Kleber, Mineiro, Gilberto Silva (Josue 46), Kaka (Elano 70), Ronaldinho, Robinho (Diego 77), Vagner Love (Ricardo Oliveira 74).
Ghana: R Kingston - Paintsil, Dickoh, J Mensah, Sarpei (Arthur 89), Annan (Benson 89), E Addo (Boateng 74), L Kingston (Kumordzi 74), Dramani, Muntari, Gyan (Tachie-Mensah 11). Sent off: Dramani 79min.

Mar 27 - Macao
China 3 (Han Peng 6, 41, Mao Jianqing 67)
Uzbekistan 1 (Shishelov 82)
HT: 2-0
China: Li Leilei - Zhai Yanpeng (Cao Yang 46), Li Weifeng, Xu Yunlong, Sun Jihai, Mao Jianqing (Yan Song 84), Zhou Haibin (Zhang Yaokun 80), Zhao Junzhe (Du Wei 46), Dong Fangzhuo (Yu Tao 87), Li Jinyu (Wang Dong 60), Han Peng (Du Zhenyu 73).

Mar 27 - Cary, USA
El Salvador 0
Honduras 2 (Jairo Martinez 1, 57)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 8,365
El Salvador: Gomez (Portillo 46) - Carballo, Salazar, Henriquez, Escobar, Alas, Menjivar, Sanchez (W Torres 26), Cerritos, Campos (Quintanilla 46), Jose Martinez.
Honduras: N Valladares (O Vallecillo 84) - Garcia (E Vallecillo 70), Mendoza, Figueroa, Guerrero (E Izaguirre 50), Claros, Oliva, W Palacios (Castro 70), Guevara (W Martinez 62), E Martinez, Jairo Martinez.

Wednesday, March 28
Mar 28 - Santiago
Chile 1 (Navia 33)
Costa Rica 1 (R Fonseca 61)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ortube (Bol)
Chile: Pinto - I Fuentes, Ponce, Rieloff (Figueroa 68), Maldonado (Nunez 61), Sanhueza, Valdivia, Jimenez (J Contreras 77), Tello (Droguett 61), Suazo, Navia.
Costa Rica: Porras - J Drummond, V Cordero, Badilla, Wallace, L Gonzalez, Montoya (J L Lopez 55), Barrantes (Ruiz 63), Centeno (Rodriguez 85), R Fonseca (Fernandez 88), Saborio (Gabriels 80).

Mar 28 - Bogota
Colombia 2 (Mosquera 32, Dominguez 87)
Paraguay 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 28,000. **Ref:** Reynoso (Ecu)
Colombia: Calero - I Cordoba, Arizala (Benitez 79), Perea, Mosquera, Vargas (Banguero 84), Viafara, Ferreira (Torres 81), Dominguez (Castrillon 90), Perea (Chitiva 58), Rey (Rodallega 58).
Paraguay: Bobadilla - Maldonado, Caniza, Morel, Bonet, Toledo (Torres 62), E Barreto (Bogado 76), Riveros (Gonzalez 30), Montiel (Chavez 68), Cabanas, Santa Cruz.

Mar 28 - Saint-Denis
France 1 (Benzema 53)
Austria 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 68,403. **Ref:** Briakos (Gre)
France: Coupet - Escude, Thuram (Gallas 46), Mexes (Abidal 46), Clerc, Mavuba, L Diarra, Diaby (Piquionne 77), Nasri (Malouda 70), Anelka, Cisse (Benzema 46).
Austria: Macho - Hiden, Stranzl, Ibertsberger (Standfest 60), Aufhauser, Prager (Sariyar 90), Fuchs, Leitgeb (Atan 83), Ivanschitz, Linz (Haas 83), Kuljic (Gercaliu 69).

Mar 28 - Duisburg
Germany 0
Denmark 1 (Bendtner 81)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 31,500. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Germany: Enke - Fritz, Madlung, M Friedrich, Jansen, Hitzlsperger, Rolfes (Castro 71), Hilbert (Freier 58), Trochowski, Kuranyi (Kiessling 46), Schlaudraff (Helmes 78).
Denmark: T Sorensen (Christiansen 46) - Priske, Gravgaard, Agger, Jacobsen, D Jensen (Wurtz 46), C Poulsen (Andreasen 46), Rommedahl (Busk Poulsen 76), Tomasson (D Sorensen 56), Kahlenberg (Gronkjaer 46), Bendtner.

Mar 28 - Oakland, USA
Mexico 4 (Palencia 29, Marquez 72, Bravo 83, Bautista 87)
Ecuador 2 (C Tenorio 44, G Espinoza 57)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 47,416. **Ref:** Toledo (USA)
Mexico: Ochoa - Osorio, Magallon (Beltran 89), Marquez, Rojas, G Galindo (Pineda 71), Arce (A Medina 46), Guardado, Palencia (Bravo 46), Lopez (I Castro 88), Borgetti (Bautista 46).
Ecuador: Aragon - Hurtado (Guagua 49), De la Cruz, L Caicedo, Mendez, F Caicedo (Zura 59; Saritama 68), Castillo, Valencia (Bagui 88), G Espinoza, Carrasco, C Tenorio (Borja 46).

Mar 28 - Johannesburg
South Africa 0
Bolivia 1 (J Vaca 19)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 5,000. **Ref:** Ramocha (Bot)
South Africa: Fernandez - Nzama (Tau 65), Thwala, A Mokoena (Mhlongo 46), Morris, Sibaya, Sapula (Fanteni 79), Pienaar (Vilakazi 46), Buckley (Van Heerden 46), Moriri, Zuma (Nomvete 46).
Bolivia: Galarza - J M Pena (Arana 71), Mendez, Alvarez, Hoyos, R Garcia, Mojica, J Vaca (Lima 76), Galindo (Ortiz 87), Salinas (Pinedo 63), Sossa.

Mar 28 - Frisco
United States 0
Guatemala 0
Att: 10,932. **Ref:** Archundia (Mex)
United States: Keller - Simek, Demerit, Conrad, Spector (Barrett 74), Dempsey, Feilhaber (Cooper 59), Bradley, Mapp, Donovan, Johnson (Mullan 67).
Guatemala: Trigueno - Medina, Melgar, G Cabrera, Albizuris, Noriega, Thompson, Contreras, Figueroa, Quinonez, Ruiz (Pezzarossi 90).

Mar 28 - Maracaibo
Venezuela 5 (Paez 8, De Ornelas 31, 49, Fedor pen 85, Hickey og 90)
New Zealand 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 12,000. **Ref:** Soto (Ven)
Venezuela: Vega (Dudamel 46) - Yori (Rosales 46), Fuenmayor, Perozo (Machado 71), Vallenilla (Rodriguez 72), Fernandez (Giroletti 66), Meza (Villafraz 46), Paez, Arango, Maldonado (Fedor 46), De Ornelas (Moran 60).
New Zealand: Paston - Lochhead (Smith 58), Hay, Old, Mulligan, Hickey, Vicelich, Bertos (Brockie 58), James, Barron, Smeltz.

GOLD CUP

In the United States

Match schedule

Group A

June 6	Costa Rica-Canada (Miami)
June 6	Guadeloupe-Haiti (Miami)
June 9	Canada-Guadeloupe (Miami)
June 9	Haiti-Costa Rica (Miami)
June 11	Costa Rica-Guadeloupe (Miami)
June 11	Haiti-Canada (Miami)

Group B

June 7	United States-Guatemala (Carson)
June 7	El Salvador-Trinidad & Tob (Carson)
June 9	Guatemala-El Salvador (Carson)
June 9	Trinidad & Tob-United States (Carson)
June 12	United States-El Salvador (Foxboro)
June 12	Trinidad & Tob-Guatemala (Foxboro)

Group C

June 8	Panama-Honduras (East Rutherford)
June 8	Mexico-Cuba (East Rutherford)
June 10	Honduras-Mexico (East Rutherford)
June 10	Panama-Cuba (East Rutherford)
June 13	Cuba-Honduras (Houston)
June 13	Mexico-Panama (Houston)

Top two in each group and the two third-placed sides with the best record qualify for quarter-finals

Quarter-finals

June 16	Gp A 1st-Gp B 2nd (QF1) (Foxboro)
June 16	Gp B 1st-Gp A or C 3rd (QF2) (Foxboro)
June 17	Gp C 1st-Gp A or B 3rd (QF3) (Houston)
June 17	Gp C 2nd-Gp A 2nd (QF4) (Houston)

Semi-finals

June 21	QF1 winners-QF2 winners (Chicago)
June 21	QF3 winners-QF4 winners (Chicago)

Final

June 24	(Chicago)

COPA AMERICA

In Venezuela

Match schedule

Group A

June 26	Uruguay-Peru (Merida)
June 26	Venezuela-Bolivia (San Cristobal)
June 30	Bolivia-Uruguay (San Cristobal)
June 30	Venezuela-Peru (San Cristobal)
July 3	Peru-Bolivia (Merida)
July 3	Venezuela-Uruguay (Merida)

Group B

June 27	Ecuador-Chile (Puerto Ordaz)
June 27	Brazil-Mexico (Puerto Ordaz)
July 1	Brazil-Chile (Maturin)
July 1	Mexico-Ecuador (Maturin)
July 4	Mexico-Chile (Puerto La Cruz)
July 4	Brazil-Ecuador (Puerto La Cruz)

Group C

June 28	Paraguay-Colombia (Maracaibo)
June 28	Argentina-United States (Maracaibo)
July 2	United States-Paraguay (Barinas)
July 2	Argentina-Colombia (Maracaibo)
July 5	Colombia-United States (Barquisimeto)
July 5	Argentina-Paraguay (Barquisimeto)

Top two in each group and the two third-placed sides with the best record qualify for quarter-finals

Quarter-finals

July 7	Gp A 1st-3rd-pl II (San Cristobal) (QF1)
July 7	3rd-pl I-Gp B 2nd (Barinas) (QF2)
July 8	Gp B 1st-Gp C 2nd (Maturin) (QF3)
July 8	Gp C 1st-Gp A 2nd (Barquisimeto) (QF4)

Semi-finals

July 10	QF1 winners-QF2 winners (Caracas)
July 11	QF3 winners-QF4 winners (Puerto Ordaz)

Third-place play-off

July 14	(Caracas)

Final

July 15	(Maracaibo)

CLUB FOOTBALL EUROPE

UEFA CUP

2nd knockout round, 2nd legs

Mar 14/15
AZ Alkmaar (Hol) 2 (Arveladze 14, Koevermans 56)
Newcastle (Eng) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Layec (Fra)
Agg 4-4. AZ on away goals

Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 3 (Voronin 36, Barbarez 56, Juan 70)
Lens (Fra) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Benquerenca (Por)
Leverkusen 4-2 on agg

Benfica (Por) 3 (Simao 12, pen 89, Petit 27)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 1 (Pauleta 32)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Meyer (Ger)
Sent off: Mulumbu (PSG) 87min
Benfica 4-3 on agg

Espanyol (Spa) 4 (De la Pena 53, Tamudo 59, Luis Garcia 61, Pandiani 90)
Maccabi Haifa (Isr) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Frojdfeldt (Swe)
Espanyol 4-0 on agg

Osasuna (Spa) 1 (Webo 71)
Rangers (Sco) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Larsen (Den)
Osasuna 2-1 on agg

Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 2 (Matuzalem 49, Elano 83)
Sevilla (Spa) 3 (Maresca 53, Palop 90, Chevanton 105)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 2-2. **Ref:** Paparesta (Ita)
Sevilla 5-4 on agg

Tottenham (Eng) 3 (Berbatov 28, 42, Malbranque 76)
Sporting Braga (Por) 2 (Huddlestone og 24, Andrade 61)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Duhamel (Fra)
Tottenham 6-4 on agg

Werder Bremen (Ger) 2 (Hugo Almeida 49, Fritz 61)
Celta Vigo (Spa) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Farina (Ita)
Werder 3-0 on agg

ROYAL LEAGUE

Final

Mar 15 - Brondby stadium, Copenhagen
Brondby (Den) 1 (Ericsson pen 37)
FC Copenhagen (Den) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 17,914. **Ref:** Ovrebo (Nor)

AUSTRIA

Mar 10: Salzburg 1 Mattersburg 1; Sturm Graz 0 Austria Wien 1; Wacker Tirol 0 Pasching 0; SV Ried 2 Altach 0.
Mar 11: Rapid Wien 1 Grazer AK 0.
Mar 17: Austria Wien 2 SV Ried 1; Mattersburg 2 Altach 1; Salzburg 3 Wacker Tirol 0; Pasching 0 Rapid Wien 1.
Mar 18: Grazer AK 0 Sturm Graz 2.

AUSTRIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	25	16	6	3	51	14	54
Mattersburg	25	11	5	9	34	39	38
Pasching	25	9	8	8	27	25	35
SV Ried	25	7	11	7	28	26	32
Rapid Wien	25	8	8	9	32	34	32
Austria Wien	25	7	10	8	28	29	31
Wacker Tirol	25	7	9	9	26	35	30
Sturm Graz*	25	9	5	11	26	30	29
Altach	25	8	3	14	34	45	27
Grazer AK**	25	6	9	10	31	40	21

*3pts deducted for licence application irregularities
**6pts deducted for failing to pay former player

BELGIUM

Friday, March 9
Charleroi 1 (Akpala 63)
Mons 0 Att: 10,176

Saturday, March 10
FC Brussels 0
Cercle Brugge 0 Att: 4,000

Club Brugge 2 (Ishiaku 15, 63)
Westerlo 0 Att: 24,358

Lierse 3 (Janssens 5, Jarju 75, Snelders 90)
Roeselare 1 (Oris 53) Att: 6,000

Lokeren 1 (Vanczak og 20)
St Truiden 1 (Simaeys 35) Att: 4,500

Mouscron 1 (Fellahi 17)
Germinal Beerschot 0 Att: 5,200

Standard 0
Gent 1 (Stoica 48) Att: 26,500

Zulte-Waregem 2 (Sergeant 26, Matthijs 56)
Beveren 1 (Gervinho 90) Att: 6,000

Sunday, March 11
Genk 1 (Ljubojevic 73)
Anderlecht 1 (Frutos 30) Att: 24,000

Friday, March 16
Germinal Beerschot 1 (Sterchele 73)
Lokeren 2 (Mbayo 49, 60) Att: 8,000

Saturday, March 17
Anderlecht 0
Zulte-Waregem 0 Att: 24,000

Beveren 1 (Gervinho 77)
Lierse 1 (Peeters 74) Att: 5,000

Club Brugge 4 (Balaban 41, 76, Daerden 55, 68)
FC Brussels 1 (Gorius pen 90) Att: 24,058

Mons 5 (Stolica 27, 29, 90, Brahami 50, Dalmat 69)
Genk 0 Att: 6,000

St Truiden 1 (Van Houdt 66)
Charleroi 1 (Orlando 78) Att: 6,000

Westerlo 1 (Dekelver 36)
Mouscron 0 Att: 5,000

Sunday, March 18
Gent 0
Cercle Brugge 2 (De Sutter 39, 67) Att: 9,015

Roeselare 2 (Oyen 83, 85)
Standard 3 (Witsel 36, Jovanovic 51, Rapajic 66) Att: 6,987

BELGIUM

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Genk	26	17	6	3	59	27	57
Anderlecht	26	16	8	2	48	25	56
Standard	26	16	4	6	54	32	52
Gent	26	14	4	8	43	32	46
Club Brugge	26	13	6	7	46	28	45
Charleroi	26	12	7	7	36	30	43
Westerlo	26	11	6	9	31	30	39
Germinal B	26	9	7	10	35	36	34
Roeselare	26	9	7	10	40	44	34
Cercle Brugge	26	9	5	12	22	26	32
Zulte-Waregem	26	8	8	10	31	37	32
Mons	26	8	6	12	27	32	30
St Truiden	26	7	6	13	31	39	27
Mouscron	26	6	9	11	34	44	27
FC Brussels	26	5	11	10	25	37	26
Lokeren	26	5	10	11	23	34	25
Beveren	26	5	6	15	24	46	21
Lierse	26	4	4	18	20	50	16

LEADING GOALSCORERS

17	Patrick Ogunsoto (Westerlo)
15	Bosko Balaban (Club Brugge)
15	Francois Sterchele (Germinal Beerschot)
15	Mohammed Tchite (Anderlecht)

BELGIAN CUP – quarter-finals

1st legs - Feb 28; 2nd legs - Mar 14
Club Brugge v Kortrijk
2-1, 1-1 (agg 3-2)
Genk v Anderlecht
0-1, 0-6 (agg 0-7)
Gent v Mechelen
2-1, 1-0 (agg 3-1)
Royal Antwerp v Standard
0-1, 0-4 (agg 0-5)

BULGARIA

Mar 10: Lokomotiv Plovdiv 1 CSKA 1; Belasitsa 2 Botev 1; Marek 1 Lokomotiv Sofia 2; Rodopa 0 Beroe 0; Cherno More 0 Slavia 1; Vihren 2 Chernomorets 0; Lovech 3 Rilski 1.
Mar 11: Spartak Varna 1 Levski 2.
Mar 16: Chernomorets 1 Marek 4; Lokomotiv Sofia 5 Rodopa 0.
Mar 17: Levski 4 Vihren 0; Rilski 1 Spartak Varna 0; Slavia 1 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 0; Botev 2 Cherno More 0; Beroe 0 Belasitsa 0.
Mar 18: CSKA 2 Lovech 0.
Mar 21: Belasitsa 1 Lokomotiv Sofia 2; Rilski 2 Levski 1; Spartak Varna 1 CSKA 3; Marek 0 Vihren 1; Rodopa 1 Chernomorets 0.
Mar 22: Cherno More 1 Beroe 0.
Mar 24: Lokomotiv Plovdiv 2 Botev 0.

BULGARIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Levski	19	15	3	1	56	5	48
CSKA	19	14	3	2	42	9	45
Lok Sofia	19	14	3	2	41	15	45
Lovech	18	10	5	3	26	16	35
Slavia	18	9	5	4	28	20	32
Cherno More	19	8	4	7	25	16	28
Botev	19	9	1	9	29	29	28
Vihren	19	8	2	9	18	22	26
Lok Plovdiv	19	7	4	8	24	22	25
Beroe	19	6	5	8	23	20	23
Rilski	19	7	0	12	20	36	21
Marek	19	5	5	9	26	35	20
Belasitsa	19	5	4	10	23	27	19
Spartak Varna	19	6	1	12	18	39	19
Rodopa	19	4	2	13	16	33	14
Chernomorets*	19	0	1	18	5	76	-2

*3pts deducted for failing to register enough youth players

CROATIA

Mar 10: Dinamo 1 Osijek 0; Medimurje 1 Rijeka 2; Pula 0 Hajduk 0; Slaven 2 Kamen Ingrad 1; Sibenik 2 Varteks 0; Cibalia 0 Zagreb 1.
Mar 17: Dinamo 1 Rijeka 0; Hajduk 2 Varteks 0; Zagreb 2 Osijek 0; Sibenik 1 Pula 0; Slaven 1 Cibalia 0; Medimurje 1 Kamen Ingrad 1.

CROATIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	23	20	2	1	56	18	62
Hajduk	23	17	3	3	41	12	54
Zagreb	23	15	1	7	39	20	46
Sibenik	23	11	4	8	34	30	37
Slaven	23	10	4	9	25	25	34
Medimurje	23	10	2	11	32	36	32
Rijeka	23	9	3	11	37	38	30
Varteks	23	8	4	11	31	42	28
Osijek	23	6	8	9	24	34	26
Pula	23	4	7	12	18	29	19
Cibalia	23	3	3	17	18	42	12
Kamen Ingrad	23	3	3	17	22	51	12

CZECH REPUBLIC

Mar 10: Slovacko 2 Teplice 2.
Mar 11: Plzen 0 Mlada Boleslav 0; Kladno 0 Pribram 0; Brno 5 Ceske Budejovice 0; Most 0 Zlin 0; Olomouc 1 Ostrava 3; Sparta 0 Jablonec 3.
Mar 12: Liberec 0 Slavia 1.
Mar 17: Ostrava 1 Slovacko 0; Zlin 0 Kladno 0.
Mar 18: Teplice 1 Plzen 2; Pribram 0 Sparta 2; Mlada Boleslav 2 Jablonec 0; Liberec 2 Olomouc 1; Ceske Budejovice 0 Most 0.
Mar 19: Slavia 2 Brno 1.

CZECH REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia	19	12	4	3	32	16	40
Sparta	19	11	6	2	22	9	39
Liberec	19	10	6	3	26	11	36
Mlada Boleslav	19	10	4	5	28	20	34
Jablonec	19	7	7	5	24	20	28
Brno	19	7	7	5	21	18	28
Ostrava	19	7	6	6	27	24	27
C Budejovice	19	7	5	7	19	27	26
Teplice	19	6	7	6	33	28	25
Plzen	19	6	7	6	20	21	25
Most	19	4	9	6	21	24	21
Kladno	19	5	5	9	16	27	20
Olomouc	19	5	3	11	19	28	18
Zlin	19	3	7	9	11	21	16
Pribram	19	2	8	9	11	23	14
Slovacko	19	1	7	11	13	26	10

DENMARK

Mar 10: Midtjylland 2 Vejle 2.
Mar 11: Horsens 2 Silkeborg 1; Esbjerg 0 FC Copenhagen 0; AaB 0 Viborg 2; OB 1 Randers 2; Brondby 2 Nordsjaelland 0.

STANDINGS ON MARCH 25

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Frederic Kanoute	Sevilla (Spa)	19	2	38
2	Afonso Alves	Heerenveen (Hol)	25	1.5	37.5
3	Didier Drogba	Chelsea (Eng)	18	2	36
	Diego Milito	Zaragoza (Spa)	18	2	36
	Francesco Totti	Roma (Ita)	18	2	36
6	Ronaldinho	Barcelona (Spa)	17	2	34
7	Cristiano Ronaldo	Manchester United (Eng)	16	2	32
8	Maksim Gruznov	Trans Narva (Est)	31	1	31
9	Rolando Bianchi	Reggina (Ita)	15	2	30
	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Internazionale (Ita)	15	2	30
	Luca Toni	Fiorentina (Ita)	15	2	30
	Alexander Zickler	Salzburg (Aut)	20	1.5	30
13	Kris Boyd	Rangers (Sco)	19	1.5	28.5
	Danny Koevermans	AZ (Hol)	19	1.5	28.5
	Daniel Nannskog	Stabaek (Nor)	19	1.5	28.5
	Blaise N'Kufo	Twente (Hol)	19	1.5	28.5
17	Ruud Van Nistelrooy	Real Madrid (Spa)	14	2	28
18	Veigar Pall Gunnarsson	Stabaek (Nor)	18	1.5	27
	Dmitri Lipartov	Trans Narva (Est)	27	1	27
	Roman Pavlyuchenko	Spartak Moscow (Rus)	18	1.5	27

Mar 17: Vejle 0 Silkeborg 2.
Mar 18: FC Copenhagen 1 Nordsjaelland 1; Esbjerg 1 OB 2; AaB 4 Horsens 0; Viborg 1 Brondby 1; Randers 0 Midtjylland 0.

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Copenhagen	20	13	6	1	36	13	45
Midtjylland	20	11	6	3	38	22	39
OB	20	11	5	4	27	18	38
AaB	20	10	4	6	27	19	34
Nordsjaelland	20	9	4	7	36	23	31
Brondby	20	7	7	6	27	22	28
Esbjerg	20	7	6	7	32	31	27
Randers	20	7	5	8	26	27	26
Viborg	20	6	4	10	21	36	22
Horsens	20	4	7	9	14	28	19
Silkeborg	20	3	2	15	18	38	11
Vejle	20	2	4	14	21	46	10

ENGLAND

Wednesday, March 14
Aston Villa 0
Arsenal 1 (Diaby 10) Att: 39,968

Manchester City 0
Chelsea 1 (Lampard pen 28) Att: 39,429

Saturday, March 17
Blackburn 1 (Samba 47)
West Ham 2 (Tevez pen 72, Zamora 75) Att: 18,591

Chelsea 3 (Shevchenko 4, Kalou 17, Ballack 58)
Sheffield United 0 Att: 41,897

Manchester United 4 (Park 14, 25, Rooney 17, 74)
Bolton 1 (Speed pen 86) Att: 76,058

Middlesbrough 0
Manchester City 2 (Distin 62, Mpenza 74) Att: 26,427

Reading 0
Portsmouth 0 Att: 24,087

Tottenham 3 (Jenas 41, Robinson 63, Ghaly 85)
Watford 1 (Henderson 89) Att: 36,051

Wigan 0
Fulham 0 Att: 16,001

Sunday, March 18
Aston Villa 0
Liverpool 0 Att: 42,551

Charlton 2 (Zheng 53, Thomas pen 88)
Newcastle 0 Att: 27,028

Everton 1 (Johnson 90)
Arsenal 0 Att: 37,162

ENGLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd	30	24	3	3	70	20	75
Chelsea	30	21	6	3	54	19	69
Arsenal	29	16	7	6	51	24	55
Liverpool	30	16	6	8	44	20	54
Bolton	30	14	5	11	35	38	47
Everton	30	12	10	8	38	26	46
Tottenham	30	13	6	11	43	44	45
Reading	30	13	5	12	43	38	44
Portsmouth	30	11	9	10	36	31	42
Blackburn	30	12	4	14	36	41	40
Newcastle	30	10	7	13	34	39	37
Middlesbrough	30	9	9	12	32	36	36
Aston Villa	30	7	13	10	29	35	34
Fulham	30	7	13	10	31	44	34
Man City	29	9	6	14	22	34	33
Wigan	30	9	6	15	30	44	33
Sheffield Utd	30	8	7	15	25	44	31
Charlton	30	7	6	17	28	49	27
West Ham	30	6	5	19	23	51	23
Watford	30	3	11	16	19	46	20

LEADING GOALSCORERS
18 Didier Drogba (Chelsea)
16 Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United)
12 Yakubu Aiyegbeni (Middlesbrough)
12 Benni McCarthy (Blackburn)
12 Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)

FA CUP – quarter-finals

Mar 10: Middlesbrough 2 Manchester United 2.
Mar 11: Blackburn 2 Manchester City 0; Chelsea 3 Tottenham 3; Plymouth 0 Watford 1.

Replays
Mar 19: Manchester United 1 Middlesbrough 0; Tottenham 1 Chelsea 2.

FRANCE

Saturday, March 10
Bordeaux 2 (Micoud 45, Cavenaghi 90)
Sochaux 0 Att: 25,128

Le Mans 2 (Coutadeur 44, Bangoura 52)
Saint-Etienne 1 (Gomis 81) Att: 14,066

Lorient 0
Lille 0 Att: 13,551

Nantes 2 (Diallo 35, Fae 73)
Nancy 1 (Brison 39) Att: 32,626

Nice 1 (Vahirua 46)
Rennes 1 (Briand 16) Att: 10,875

Toulouse 1 (Mathieu 26)
Monaco 1 (Koller 76) Att: 27,595

Troyes 1 (Gigliotti 90)
Valenciennes 3 (Bezzaz 38, Roudet 67, Dufresne 86) Att: 13,572

Sunday, March 11
Lens 1 (Seydou Keita 30)
Sedan 1 (Pujol 2) Att: 29,939

Lyon 1 (Baros 20)
Marseille 1 (Niang 87) Att: 38,930

Paris Saint-Germain 0
Auxerre 1 (Kaboul 41) Att: 33,036

Saturday, March 17
Lille 0
Le Mans 2 (Bangoura 68, Grafite 90) Att: 14,136

Marseille 3 (Niang 7, 41, Civelli 16)
Nice 0 Att: 50,000

Monaco 2 (Perez 34, Givet 43)
Nantes 1 (Da Rocha 14) Att: 9,718

Nancy 0
Lyon 3 (Baros 36, Kallstrom 76, Fred 81) Att: 19,919

Saint-Etienne 3 (Feindouno 2, Gomis 18, Guarin 50)
Troyes 1 (Nivet pen 43) Att: 27,225

Sedan 1 (Boutabout 47)
Bordeaux 1 (Darcheville 28) Att: 16,994

Sochaux 4 (Grax 22, 55, Leroy 32, Isabey 64)
Toulouse 2 (Mansare 88, Emana 90) Att: 11,485

Valenciennes 0
Lorient 0 Att: 15,359

Sunday, March 18
Auxerre 1 (Kahlenberg 17)
Lens 0 Att: 9,579

Rennes 1 (Briand 76)
Paris Saint-Germain 0 Att: 27,085

FRANCE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lyon	29	20	5	4	54	23	65
Lens	29	13	10	6	42	31	49
Bordeaux	29	13	5	11	31	30	44
Lille	29	11	10	8	36	27	43
Sochaux	29	11	10	8	35	34	43
Toulouse	29	12	7	10	33	33	43
Saint-Etienne	29	12	6	11	46	39	42
Marseille	29	12	6	11	35	29	42
Le Mans	29	10	11	8	35	33	41
Auxerre	29	10	11	8	32	33	41
Rennes	29	10	10	9	25	24	40
Monaco	29	10	8	11	34	30	38
Lorient	29	9	10	10	25	29	37
Nancy	29	9	9	11	26	34	36
Valenciennes	29	9	6	14	29	40	33
Nice	29	7	10	12	25	30	31
Troyes	29	7	9	13	29	44	30
Nantes	29	6	11	12	25	36	29
Paris SG	29	6	10	13	27	36	28
Sedan	29	5	12	12	37	46	27

LEADING GOALSCORERS
13 Steve Savidan (Valenciennes)
11 Aruna Dindane (Lens)
10 Ismael Bangoura (Le Mans)
10 Fred (Lyon)
10 Pauleta (Paris Saint-Germain)

GERMANY

Friday, March 9
Nurnberg 2 (Spycher og 81, Vittek 87)
Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Kyrgiakos 26, Takahara 69) Att: 44,055

Saturday, March 10
Bochum 2 (Gekas 48, 83)
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 31,278

Energie Cottbus 0
Alemannia Aachen 2 (Rosler 28, Pinto 90) Att: 15,200

Hannover 1 (Tarnat 4)
Schalke 1 (Halil Altintop 2) Att: 49,000

Mainz 1 (Andreasen pen 51)
Arminia Bielefeld 0 Att: 20,200

Monchengladbach 3 (Rafael 32, 69, Delura 86)
Hertha 1 (Gimenez 56) Att: 40,518

Stuttgart 0
Wolfsburg 0 Att: 44,000

Sunday, March 11
Bayern Munich 1 (Podolski 7)
Werder Bremen 1 (Rosenberg 66) Att: 69,000

Hamburg 0
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 55,337

Friday, March 16
Hertha 0
Energie Cottbus 1 (Radu 47) Att: 51,831

Saturday, March 17
Alemannia Aachen 2 (Schlaudraff 71, Reghecampf pen 76)
Arminia Bielefeld 0 Att: 20,800

Borussia Dortmund 0
Nurnberg 0 Att: 80,100

Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Preuss 78)
Bayern Munich 0 Att: 51,500

Hannover 0
Hamburg 0 Att: 49,000

Schalke 1 (Krstajic 76)
Stuttgart 0 Att: 61,482

Wolfsburg 3 (Boakye 21, Madlung 26, Marcelinho 83)
Bochum 1 (Gekas 66) Att: 15,743

Sunday, March 18
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Voronin 90)
Monchengladbach 0 Att: 22,500

Werder Bremen 2 (Vranjes 60, Diego 90)
Mainz 0 Att: 39,450

GERMANY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Schalke	26	16	5	5	42	25	53
Werder Bremen	26	15	5	6	61	33	50
Stuttgart	26	13	7	6	42	30	46
Bayern Munich	26	13	5	8	39	31	44
B Leverkusen	26	11	6	9	40	35	39
Nurnberg	26	8	14	4	36	24	38
Hannover	26	9	8	9	33	37	35
Hertha	26	9	7	10	36	42	34
Alemannia	26	9	6	11	41	45	33
Wolfsburg	26	7	11	8	27	29	32
E Cottbus	26	8	7	11	29	36	31
E Frankfurt	26	6	12	8	33	44	30
Mainz	26	7	9	10	23	37	30
Hamburg	26	5	14	7	29	27	29
B Dortmund	26	7	8	11	29	37	29
Bochum	26	7	6	13	30	42	27
A Bielefeld	26	6	8	12	31	36	26
M'gladbach	26	6	6	14	21	32	24

LEADING GOALSCORERS
13 Theofanis Gekas (Bochum)
13 Mario Gomez (Stuttgart)
12 Roy Makaay (Bayern Munich)
11 Alexander Frei (Borussia Dortmund)
11 Miroslav Klose (Werder Bremen)
11 Kevin Kuranyi (Schalke)
11 Marko Pantelic (Hertha)

GREECE

Mar 10: Atromitos 3 Xanthi 3; PAOK 2 Aigaleo 0.
Mar 11: Panionios 2 Ionikos 0; OFI 3 Kerkira 4; Larisa 0 AEK 1; Apollon 1 Olympiakos 2; Aris 1 Iraklis 0; Panathinaikos 0 Ergotelis 1.
Mar 17: Aigaleo 1 OFI 2; Ionikos 0 PAOK 2.
Mar 18: Ergotelis 0 Apollon 1; Xanthi 1 Panionios 1; Iraklis 1 Larisa 0; Kerkira 0 AEK 1; Olympiakos 0 Aris 0; Panathinaikos 1 Atromitos 2.

GREECE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	26	20	3	3	53	18	63
AEK	26	16	7	3	49	21	55
Panathinaikos	26	16	3	7	43	23	51
PAOK	26	11	6	9	28	24	39
Aris	26	8	13	5	25	22	37
Panionios	26	9	9	8	25	26	36
OFI	26	10	6	10	35	38	36
Atromitos	26	8	10	8	36	40	34
Ergotelis	26	9	6	11	24	25	33
Xanthi	26	7	11	8	19	18	32
Larisa	26	8	7	11	27	34	31
Apollon	26	8	7	11	22	30	31
Kerkira	26	7	9	10	26	30	30
Aigaleo	26	7	6	13	24	35	27
Iraklis	26	7	4	15	21	33	25
Ionikos*	26	2	3	21	9	49	4

*5pts deducted – 3pts for club chairman's attack on a referee, 2pts for crowd trouble during a home game

HOLLAND

Friday, March 9
Roda JC 0
Utrecht 0 Att: 13,823

Saturday, March 10
Heerenveen 1 (Hansson 30)
RKC 0 Att: 25,500

NAC 1 (Slot 33)
Heracles 1 (Gluscevic 53) Att: 14,812

Sparta 0
NEC 4 (Barreto 10, Beerens 45, Olsson 54, Holman 69) Att: 10,115

Willem II 3 (Cristiano 1, Hadouir 33, 70)
Groningen 0 Att: 12,500

Sunday, March 11
AZ 0
Feyenoord 0 Att: 16,529

Excelsior 0
PSV 0 Att: 3,300

Twente 1 (N'Kufo 7)
Ajax 4 (Huntelaar 21, 30, 75, Babel 45) Att: 13,250

Vitesse 2 (Junker 15, Benson 90)
Den Haag 2 (Kolk 11, pen 38) Att: 18,285

Friday, March 16
RKC 3 (De Fauw og 16, Berger 34, Van den Bergh 71)
Roda JC 2 (Ramzi 31, Vandamme 61) Att: 6,218

Saturday, March 17
Den Haag 2 (Rankovic 60, De Vries 80)
Sparta 4 (Polak pen 36, 43, Lopes 56, Krohn-Dehli 77)
Match played behind closed doors

Heerenveen 4 (Afonso Alves 9, 39, 68, Nilsson 64)
NAC 2 (Salmon 29, 82) Att: 25,300

NEC 0
Excelsior 1 (Slory 40) Att: 12,500

Sunday, March 18
Feyenoord 0
Willem II 0 Att: 41,000

Groningen 1 (Suarez 70)
Twente 1 (Touma 26) Att: 19,764

Heracles 0
AZ 0 Att: 8,500

PSV 1 (Kluivert 68)
Ajax 5 (Huntelaar 17, 72, Sneijder 44, Gabri 73, Perez 89) Att: 35,100

Utrecht 2 (Dickoh 20, Caluwe 51)
Vitesse 0 Att: 21,400

HOLLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV	29	21	4	4	65	20	67
Ajax	29	19	5	5	70	31	62
AZ	29	17	9	3	71	26	60
Twente	29	17	7	5	60	32	58
Feyenoord	29	14	7	8	52	52	49
Heerenveen	29	14	5	10	48	35	47
Roda JC	29	11	9	9	34	35	42
NAC	29	12	6	11	40	43	42
Utrecht	29	11	7	11	34	39	40
Groningen	29	11	6	12	42	50	39
NEC	29	10	7	12	29	35	37
Vitesse	29	9	7	13	45	47	34
Sparta	29	9	5	15	34	55	32
Willem II	29	7	6	16	28	55	27
Heracles	29	5	10	14	24	50	25
Excelsior	29	6	6	17	35	54	24
RKC	29	5	7	17	27	54	22
Den Haag	29	3	7	19	35	60	16

LEADING GOALSCORERS
25 Afonso Alves (Heerenveen)
19 Danny Koevermans (AZ)
19 Blaise N'Kufo (Twente)
17 Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Ajax)
17 Danko Lazovic (Vitesse)
16 Jefferson Farfan (PSV)

HUNGARY

Mar 9: Vasas 2 Fehervar 2.
Mar 10: Kaposvar 4 Tatabanya 0; Sopron 0 Gyor 1; Rakospalota 1 Honved 2; Vac 1 Debrecen 3; Paks 3 MTK 1; Pecs 1 Diosgyor 0.
Mar 12: Zalaegerszeg 2 Ujpest 0.
Mar 16: Honved 2 Debrecen 1.
Mar 17: Fehervar 1 Kaposvar 2; Diosgyor 2 Paks 1; Ujpest 1 Sopron 0; Tatabanya 1 Vac 2; Rakospalota 2 Zalaegerszeg 1.
Mar 18: Gyor 0 Pecs 0.
Mar 19: MTK 2 Vasas 2.

HUNGARY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
MTK	21	14	4	3	40	17	46
Debrecen	21	14	3	4	39	16	45
Zalaegerszeg	21	12	3	6	35	26	39
Ujpest	21	11	3	7	28	19	36
Diosgyor	21	10	2	9	28	28	32
Vasas	21	9	4	8	23	27	31
Fehervar	21	9	3	9	28	27	30
Pecs	21	7	8	6	22	25	29
Honved	21	8	4	9	35	31	28
Gyor	21	7	6	8	25	28	27
Paks	21	7	5	9	21	22	26
Kaposvar	21	7	2	12	25	27	23
Tatabanya	21	7	2	12	31	38	23
Sopron	21	7	2	12	17	34	23
Rakospalota	21	6	5	10	26	36	23
Vac	21	2	6	13	15	37	12

ITALY

Saturday, March 10
Sampdoria 1 (Palombo 40)
Cagliari 1 (Suazo 63) Att: 17,259

Sunday, March 11
Atalanta 1 (Defendi 52)
Parma 1 (Coly 87) Att: 8,092

Chievo 1 (Sammarco 73)
Messina 1 (Rigano pen 87) Att: 4,221

Empoli 2 (Pratali 28, Almiron 45)
Livorno 2 (Rezaei 58, Lucarelli 90) Att: 4,925

Inter 2 (Cruz 54, Ibrahimovic 75)
Milan 1 (Ronaldo 40) Att: 53,681

Palermo 1 (Cavani 71)
Fiorentina 1 (Mutu 33) Att: 22,476

Reggina 2 (Tedesco 26, Foggia 65)
Lazio 3 (Manfredini 45, Pandev 45, Makinwa 79) Att: 10,236

Roma 3 (Totti pen 33, 60, Perrotta 40)
Udinese 1 (Gyan 69) Att: 30,817

Siena 0
Ascoli 1 (Bertotto og 22) Att: 10,792

Torino 1 (Rosina 77)
Catania 0 Att: 19,777

Saturday, March 17
Sampdoria 1 (Quagliarella 56)
Palermo 1 (Cavani 53) Att: 17,596

Sunday, March 18
Ascoli 1 (Bonanni pen 90)
Inter 2 (Ibrahimovic 65, 71) Att: 4,787

Cagliari 0
Chievo 2 (Brighi 50, Bogdani 55) Att: 8,000

Catania 1 (Rossini 90)
Reggina 4 (Amoruso 58, Foggia 62, Bianchi pen 85, Esteves 88)
Match played behind closed doors in Rimini

Fiorentina 0
Roma 0 Att: 23,900

Lazio 3 (Pandev 8, Rocchi 27, Manfredini 74)
Empoli 1 (Almiron 89) Att: 25,527

Messina 0
Torino 3 (Muzzi 26, Rosina pen 77, Stellone 85) Att: 7,940

Milan 1 (Ambrosini 40)
Atalanta 0 Att: 45,491

Parma 1 (Gasbarroni 19)
Siena 0 Att: 12,777

Udinese 4 (Di Natale 34, 69, Gyan 37, Barreto pen 83)
Livorno 0 Att: 13,652

ITALY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter	28	24	4	0	61	23	76
Roma	28	17	7	4	55	22	58
Lazio*	28	15	7	6	47	22	49
Palermo	29	13	8	8	43	34	47
Milan*	28	14	9	5	38	24	43
Empoli	28	11	9	8	28	27	42
Fiorentina*	28	15	7	6	45	24	37
Sampdoria	28	9	8	11	35	35	35
Udinese	28	9	8	11	34	37	35
Atalanta	28	7	11	10	40	40	32
Catania	29	8	8	13	36	54	32
Torino	28	8	7	13	24	39	31
Livorno	28	6	11	11	27	43	29
Chievo	28	6	9	13	31	39	27
Siena*	28	5	13	10	24	32	27
Cagliari	28	5	12	11	21	32	27
Reggina*	28	9	9	10	38	40	25
Messina	28	5	9	14	28	46	24
Parma	28	4	10	14	24	46	22
Ascoli	28	3	10	15	21	41	19

*Milan had 8pts deducted, Lazio 3pts, Reggina 11pts and Fiorentina 15pts for their part in the country's match-fixing scandal. Siena had 1pt deducted for late payment of taxes

LEADING GOALSCORERS
18 Francesco Totti (Roma)
15 Rolando Bianchi (Reggina)
15 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Inter)
15 Luca Toni (Fiorentina)
13 Adrian Mutu (Fiorentina)
13 Tommaso Rocchi (Lazio)

POLAND

Mar 9: Legia 0 Groclin 1.
Mar 10: Wisla K 2 Arka 2; Pogon 0 Gornik Z 0; Wisla P 0 Korona 1; Gornik L 0 LKS 1; Odra 0 Cracovia 1; Lech 0 Zaglebie 2.
Mar 11: Widzew 0 Belchatow 3.
Mar 16: LKS 0 Widzew 0.
Mar 17: Arka 2 Pogon 0; Wisla P 0 Wisla K 0; Lech 3 Korona 0; Cracovia 2 Zaglebie 4; Groclin 1 Odra 1; Gornik Z 2 Gornik L 3.
Mar 18: Belchatow 3 Legia 1.

POLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belchatow	18	12	3	3	43	18	39
Zaglebie	18	10	6	2	27	17	36
Korona	18	10	3	5	26	18	33
LKS	18	8	7	3	21	15	31
Wisla K	18	7	9	2	32	15	30
Legia	18	8	4	6	30	20	28
Lech	18	6	7	5	33	24	25
Cracovia	18	7	4	7	23	29	25
Groclin	18	4	12	2	19	16	24
Arka	18	4	10	4	22	19	22
Widzew	18	4	5	9	16	24	17
Gornik L	18	4	5	9	12	35	17
Gornik Z	18	4	4	10	20	31	16
Pogon	18	3	6	9	14	22	15
Odra	18	2	7	9	14	29	13
Wisla P	18	1	8	9	12	32	11

PORTUGAL

Friday, March 9
Naval 1 (Saulo 5)
Boavista 1 (Kazmierczak 45)

Saturday, March 10
Belenenses 2 (Jose Pedro pen 14, Dady 41)
Nacional 0

Sporting Lisbon 3 (Joao Moutinho 39, Djalo 48, 50)
Estrela Amadora 1 (Moses 85)

Sunday, March 11
Academica 0
Pacos Ferreira 2 (Geraldo 9, Renato Queiros 81)

Maritimo 1 (Douglas 86)
FC Porto 2 (Adriano 18, Raul Meireles 28)

Setubal 1 (Amuneke 9)
Aves 1 (Sergio Carvalho 26)

Sporting Braga 0
Beira Mar 0

Monday, March 12
Benfica 2 (Simao 16, Petit 85)
Uniao Leiria 0

Friday, March 16
Nacional 2 (Ricardo Fernandes 8, Juliano Spadacio 37)
Boavista 0

Saturday, March 17
FC Porto 0
Sporting Lisbon 1 (Tello 72)

Sunday, March 18
Aves 2 (Jorge Ribeiro 72, Hernani 85)
Academica 2 (Dame 37, Filipe Teixeira 90)

Beira Mar 2 (Andre Leao 22, Alcaraz 90)
Maritimo 2 (Lipatin 83, Mbesuma 86)

Pacos Ferreira 0
Belenenses 2 (Candido Costa 45, Dady 77)

Uniao Leiria 1 (N'Gal 54)
Setubal 1 (Ayew 90)

Monday, March 19
Estrela Amadora 0
Benfica 1 (Petit 81)

Tuesday, March 20
Sporting Braga 2 (Joao Pinto 28, Ze Carlos pen 86)
Naval 1 (Nei 67)

PORTUGAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Porto	22	17	1	4	46	12	52
Benfica	22	16	3	3	43	15	51
Sporting Lisbon	22	13	7	2	33	13	46
Sporting Braga	22	10	5	7	28	26	35
Belenenses	22	10	4	8	25	20	34
Pacos Ferreira	22	8	8	6	24	28	32
Nacional	22	9	4	9	32	28	31
Uniao Leiria	22	8	6	8	17	21	30
Maritimo	22	8	5	9	26	29	29
Naval	22	7	7	8	22	24	28
Boavista	22	5	10	7	23	25	25
E Amadora	22	6	6	10	15	25	24
Academica	22	5	5	12	23	36	20
Setubal	22	3	7	12	13	31	16
Beira Mar	22	2	9	11	21	43	15
Aves	22	2	7	13	14	29	13

LEADING GOALSCORERS
10 Simao Sabrosa (Benfica)
9 Helder Postiga (FC Porto)
9 Nei (Naval)
8 Liedson (Sporting Lisbon)
8 Ze Pedro (Belenenses)

PORTUGUESE CUP – quarter-finals

Feb 28: Beira Mar 2 Boavista 0 (aet); Braganca 1 Belenenses 2; Sporting Lisbon 2 Academica 1.
Mar 25: Sporting Braga 2 Varzim 0.

ROMANIA

Mar 9: Otelul 5 National 2; Poli Iasi 4 Jiul 0.
Mar 10: Arges 1 Vaslui 1; Gloria 1 Poli Timisoara 1; CFR Cluj 1 Pandurii 0; Farul 1 Steaua 1.
Mar 11: Urziceni 2 Ceahlaul 0; Rapid 4 UTA 0; Dinamo 0 U Craiova 0.
Mar 16: Ceahlaul 0 Farul 0; Pandurii 2 Otelul 1.
Mar 17: Steaua 2 Arges 0; Vaslui 1 Rapid 1; Poli Timisoara 0 Poli Iasi 1; Jiul 0 CFR Cluj 2.
Mar 18: UTA 1 Dinamo 1; U Craiova 1 Gloria 2; National 0 Urziceni 2.

ROMANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	23	18	4	1	44	12	58
CFR Cluj	23	14	4	5	43	25	46
Steaua	23	12	8	3	40	12	44
Rapid	23	12	8	3	40	15	44
Gloria	23	12	4	7	30	21	40
Poli Timisoara	23	9	7	7	22	19	34
Vaslui	23	9	7	7	29	32	34
Otelul	23	10	3	10	36	42	33
Poli Iasi	23	8	7	8	28	28	31
Pandurii	23	8	5	10	18	24	29
Urziceni	23	8	4	11	20	23	28
Farul	23	6	9	8	23	23	27
UTA	23	7	6	10	18	25	27
U Craiova	23	6	9	8	23	35	27
Ceahlaul	23	6	4	13	18	35	22
Arges	23	4	5	14	14	29	17
National	23	3	5	15	16	39	14
Jiul	23	3	5	15	9	32	14

RUSSIA

Mar 10: Luch-Energiya 0 FC Moscow 1; Tom 2 Spartak Nalchik 0; Kryliya Sovetov 1 Khimki 0.
Mar 11: Zenit 1 Saturn 1; CSKA 3 Rubin 1; Amkar 3 Rostov 1; Dinamo 0 Spartak Moscow 1; Kuban 0 Lokomotiv 0.
Mar 17: Lokomotiv 2 Rubin 1; Khimki 1 Kuban 0; Spartak Nalchik 0 Kryliya Sovetov 0; FC Moscow 2 Tom 0.
Mar 18: Dinamo 1 CSKA 1; Saturn 0 Luch-Energiya 1; Rostov 2 Zenit 3; Spartak Moscow 0 Amkar 0.

RUSSIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Moscow	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
CSKA	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Amkar	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Zenit	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Lokomotiv	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Kryliya Sovetov	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Spartak M	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Tom	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Khimki	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Luch-Energiya	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Dinamo	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Saturn	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Kuban	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Spartak N	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Rostov	2	0	0	2	3	6	0
Rubin	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

SCOTLAND

Saturday, March 10
Aberdeen 1 (Lovell 7)
Hearts 0 Att: 13,964

Dundee United 1 (Robb 29)
Motherwell 1 (Murphy 37) Att: 5,183

Dunfermline 0
St Mirren 0 Att: 7,149

Hibernian 2 (Benjelloun 52, 74)
Falkirk 0 Att: 12,572

Kilmarnock 3 (Di Giacomo 17, 27, Naismith 40)
Inverness 2 (Paatelainen 10, Dods 48) Att: 7,630

Sunday, March 11
Celtic 0
Rangers 1 (Ehiogu 50) Att: 59,425

Tuesday, March 13
Motherwell 0
Aberdeen 2 (Fitzpatrick og 32, Foster 90) Att: 4,530

Saturday, March 17
Hearts 0
Dundee United 4 (Robson 51, 59, 78, Hunt 70) Att: 17,172

Inverness 1 (Paatelainen 23)
Dunfermline 3 (Glass 48, pen 79, McIntyre 61) Att: 4,447

Rangers 3 (Boyd 8, 25, 31)
Aberdeen 0 Att: 50,354

Sunday, March 18
Falkirk 1 (Thomson 16)
Celtic 0 Att: 6,438

SCOTLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	31	23	5	3	57	24	74
Rangers	31	18	7	6	52	24	61
Aberdeen	31	16	6	9	42	28	54
Hearts	31	13	9	9	38	30	48
Hibernian	30	12	7	11	48	34	43
Kilmarnock	30	12	7	11	41	46	43
Falkirk	31	11	3	17	37	41	36
Dundee Utd	31	9	9	13	34	50	36
Inverness	31	8	10	13	34	43	34
Motherwell	30	9	6	15	33	47	33
St Mirren	30	5	11	14	23	43	26
Dunfermline	31	4	8	19	18	47	20

LEADING GOALSCORERS
19 Kris Boyd (Rangers)
14 Anthony Stokes (Falkirk)
13 Chris Killen (Hibernian)
12 Steven Naismith (Kilmarnock)
11 Scott McDonald (Motherwell)
11 Barry Robson (Dundee United)

LEAGUE CUP – Final

Mar 18 - Glasgow
Kilmarnock 1 (Greer 77)
Hibernian 5 (Jones 28, Benjelloun 59, 85, Fletcher 66, 87)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 52,000. **Ref:** McDonald

SERBIA

Mar 10: Smederevo 0 Banat 1; Red Star 0 Vojvodina 3; Vozdovac 0 Borac 0; Mladost 0 OFK 0; Zemun 1 Partizan 2.
Mar 11: Hajduk K 1 Bezanija 1.
Mar 17: Vojvodina 1 Smederevo 0; OFK 0 Red Star 1; Mladost 1 Vozdovac 0; Banat 2 Zemun 1.
Mar 18: Partizan 0 Hajduk K 1; Bezanija 0 Borac 0.

SERBIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star	21	15	3	3	35	16	48
Partizan	21	12	3	6	31	20	39
Mladost	21	9	8	4	19	11	35
Vojvodina	21	10	4	7	19	15	34
OFK	21	8	8	5	27	14	32
Hajduk K	21	10	2	9	19	20	32
Bezanija	21	6	12	3	23	17	30
Banat	21	8	5	8	19	25	29
Smederevo	21	5	7	9	15	20	22
Borac	21	5	7	9	10	16	22
Vozdovac	21	4	6	11	16	30	18
Zemun	21	0	3	18	7	36	3

SPAIN

Saturday, March 10
Barcelona 3 (Messi 11, 28, 90)
Real Madrid 3 (Van Nistelrooy 5, pen 13, Sergio Ramos 58) Att: 97,823

Levante 0
Villarreal 2 (Forlan 9, Tomasson 72) Att: 18,598

Sunday, March 11
Atletico Madrid 2 (Galletti 1, Mista 84)
Deportivo La Coruna 0 Att: 48,000

Betis 1 (Marcos Assuncao pen 45)
Zaragoza 1 (D Milito 23) Att: 38,000

Celta Vigo 1 (Angel 35)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Aduritz 70) Att: 20,000

Getafe 1 (Guiza 24)
Recreativo 1 (Uche 4) Att: 11,000

Gimnastic 1 (Portillo 76)
Sevilla 0 Att: 14,500

Osasuna 1 (Punal pen 35)
Valencia 1 (Morientes 90) Att: 17,230

Racing Santander 1 (Garay pen 9)
Espanyol 1 (Riera 6) Att: 17,170

Real Sociedad 3 (Savio 26, Kovacevic 45, Xabier Prieto 90)
Mallorca 1 (Ibagaza 39) Att: 25,088

Saturday, March 17
Athletic Bilbao 0
Osasuna 3 (Inaki Munoz pen 30, David Lopez 46, Izquierdo 75) Att: 39,000

Mallorca 2 (Pereyra 1, Arango 2)
Betis 0 Att: 18,000

Recreativo 0
Barcelona 4 (Eto'o 3, 42, Zambrotta 40, Messi 86) Att: 19,000

Valencia 0
Racing Santander 2 (Munitis 20, Oriol 63) Att: 40,000

Sunday, March 18
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Barragan 79)
Getafe 0 Att: 10,000

Espanyol 1 (Luis Garcia 18)
Levante 1 (Reggi 13) Att: 17,500

Real Madrid 2 (Robinho 55, David Garcia og 80)
Gimnastic 0 Att: 75,000

Sevilla 2 (Kanoute pen 52, Kerzhakov 90)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 45,000

Villarreal 1 (Josico 57)
Real Sociedad 1 (Savio 39) Att: 19,000

Zaragoza 1 (D Milito 20)
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 34,000

SPAIN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	27	15	8	4	57	25	53
Sevilla	27	16	5	6	48	24	53
Real Madrid	27	14	6	7	37	24	48
Valencia	27	14	5	8	37	26	47
Zaragoza	27	13	7	7	40	27	46
Atletico Madrid	27	12	7	8	32	23	43
Recreativo	27	12	5	10	35	35	41
R Santander	27	10	10	7	30	30	40
Getafe	27	10	8	9	23	19	38
Espanyol	27	9	11	7	29	28	38
Villarreal	27	10	7	10	26	32	37
Dep La Coruna	27	9	9	9	20	28	36
Osasuna	27	10	4	13	34	33	34
Mallorca	27	9	5	13	28	39	32
Betis	27	7	10	10	25	31	31
Levante	27	6	10	11	23	37	28
Celta Vigo	27	6	9	12	27	38	27
Athletic Bilbao	27	6	8	13	27	40	26
Gimnastic	27	5	5	17	28	50	20
Real Sociedad	27	3	9	15	19	36	18

LEADING GOALSCORERS
19 Frederic Kanoute (Sevilla)
18 Diego Milito (Zaragoza)
17 Ronaldinho (Barcelona)
14 Ruud Van Nistelrooy (Real Madrid)
11 Fernando Morientes (Valencia)

SPANISH CUP – quarter-finals

1st legs - Jan 31; 2nd legs - Feb 28/Mar 20
Barcelona v Zaragoza 0-1, 2-1 (agg 2-2; Barcelona on away goals)
Dep La Coruna v Valladolid 4-1, 1-1 (agg 5-2)
Getafe v Osasuna 3-0, 0-1 (agg 3-1)
Sevilla v Betis 0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)

SWITZERLAND

Mar 10: Zurich 2 Aarau 2; Thun 3 St Gallen 1; Basle 0 Schaffhausen 0.
Mar 11: Sion 1 Grasshopper 1; Lucerne 1 Young Boys 1.
Mar 17: Grasshopper 5 Lucerne 0; Thun 0 Zurich 1.
Mar 18: St Gallen 1 Young Boys 1; Schaffhausen 0 Sion 1; Aarau 0 Basle 1.

SWITZERLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zurich	24	16	3	5	46	21	51
Basle	24	13	5	6	49	32	44
St Gallen	24	13	4	7	35	28	43
Grasshopper	24	12	6	6	44	25	42
Young Boys	24	11	5	8	37	30	38
Sion	24	10	7	7	37	33	37
Lucerne	24	7	6	11	24	33	27
Thun	24	5	6	13	17	42	21
Schaffhausen	24	3	7	14	21	43	16
Aarau	24	4	3	17	18	41	15

TURKEY

Mar 9: Sakaryaspor 3 Kayserispor 3.
Mar 10: Genclerbirligi 0 Gaziantepspor 0; Sivasspor 3 Bursaspor 1; Fenerbahce 3 Konyaspor 0.
Mar 11: Rizespor 3 Manisaspor 1; Antalyaspor 1 Ankaraspor 1; Erciyesspor 2 Denizlispor 0; Ankaragucu 0 Besiktas 1; Galatasaray 2 Trabzonspor 1.
Mar 16: Konyaspor 2 Galatasaray 2.
Mar 17: Gaziantepspor 1 Rizespor 0; Ankaraspor 2 Sivasspor 1; Bursaspor 0 Fenerbahce 4; Trabzonspor 0 Ankaragucu 1; Denizlispor 3 Genclerbirligi 2; Kayserispor 4 Antalyaspor 4.
Mar 18: Besiktas 1 Erciyesspor 0.

TURKEY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	25	15	6	4	49	22	51
Besiktas	25	13	6	6	35	23	45
Galatasaray	25	11	9	5	44	27	42
Kayserispor	25	10	10	5	37	29	40
Genclerbirligi	25	11	5	9	31	27	38
Konyaspor	25	9	8	8	33	32	35
Sivasspor	25	10	5	10	29	32	35
Ankaraspor	25	7	13	5	28	26	34
Trabzonspor	25	9	6	10	32	30	33
Bursaspor	25	9	6	10	27	31	33
Antalyaspor	25	7	11	7	27	27	32
Ankaragucu	25	8	8	9	25	25	32
Gaziantepspor	25	8	7	10	23	30	31
Manisaspor	24	8	5	11	34	38	29
Rizespor	25	8	4	13	21	27	28
Denizlispor	25	6	8	11	22	33	26
Erciyesspor	25	6	7	12	21	41	25
Sakaryaspor	24	3	8	13	16	34	17

UKRAINE

Mar 10: Metalurh Z 1 Chornomorets 0; Kryvbas 1 Dynamo 1.
Mar 11: Zorya 1 Karpaty 0; Arsenal 0 Tavriya 1; Vorskla 0 Dnipro 1; Illichivets 0 Stal 0; Metalurh D 1 FC Kharkiv 2; Metalist 0 Shakhtar 1.
Mar 17: Dnipro 2 Tavriya 0; Dynamo 4 Zorya 0.
Mar 18: Metalurh Z 2 Arsenal 1; Chornomorets 2 Kryvbas 3; FC Kharkiv 2 Illichivets 0; Stal 0 Vorskla 1.
Mar 19: Shakhtar 2 Metalurh D 1.

UKRAINE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	19	15	4	0	46	14	49
Shakhtar	19	15	2	2	42	7	47
Dnipro	19	7	10	2	18	10	31
Metalist	18	8	6	4	18	14	30
Tavriya	19	8	3	8	16	17	27
Arsenal	19	6	7	6	19	22	25
Kryvbas	19	5	10	4	22	23	25
Karpaty	18	6	6	6	14	18	24
Chornomorets	19	6	5	8	24	27	23
Metalurh Z	19	5	7	7	13	22	22
Metalurh D	19	5	6	8	16	23	21
FC Kharkiv	19	5	5	9	18	28	20
Vorskla	19	5	4	10	13	19	19
Illichivets	19	4	5	10	14	23	17
Zorya	19	3	6	10	14	31	15
Stal	19	3	4	12	13	22	13

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Group 1
Mar 21
Banfield (Arg) 3 (Lujambio 24, 39, Cvitanich 70)
America (Mex) 1 (Cabanas 89)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Grance (Par)

Mar 22
Libertad (Par) 1 (Bonet 10)
El Nacional (Ecu) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Baldassi (Arg)

GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
America	4	2	0	2	8	8	6
Banfield	4	2	0	2	7	7	6
El Nacional	4	0	1	3	3	8	1

Feb 20 El Nacional-America 1-2
Feb 20 Libertad-Banfield 1-0
Feb 27 Banfield-El Nacional 4-1
Mar 1 America-Libertad 1-4
Mar 6 El Nacional-Libertad 1-1
Mar 7 America-Banfield 4-0
Mar 21 Banfield-America 3-1
Mar 22 Libertad-El Nacional 1-0
Apr 3 El Nacional-Banfield
Apr 11 Libertad-America
Apr 18 Banfield-Libertad
Apr 18 America-El Nacional

Group 2
Mar 13
Alianza Lima (Per) 1 (Silva 67)
Audax Italiano (Chl) 3 (Villanueva 44, Cereceda 81, Moya 88)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Reinoso (Ecu)

Mar 21
Necaxa (Mex) 2 (Kleber Boas 61, Salgueiro 68)
Sao Paulo (Bra) 1 (Jadilson 40)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Pezzotta (Arg)

Mar 27
Audax Italiano 1 (Moya 26)
Alianza Lima 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Paniagua (Bol)

GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Necaxa	3	3	0	0	6	2	9
Audax Italiano	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Sao Paulo	3	1	1	1	5	2	4
Alianza Lima	4	0	0	4	2	10	0

Feb 14 Audax Italiano-Sao Paulo 0-0
Feb 20 Alianza Lima-Necaxa 1-2
Feb 28 Necaxa-Audax Italiano 2-0
Feb 28 Sao Paulo-Alianza Lima 4-0
Mar 13 Alianza Lima-Audax Italiano 1-3
Mar 21 Necaxa-Sao Paulo 2-1
Mar 27 Audax Italiano-Alianza Lima 1-0
Apr 4 Sao Paulo-Necaxa
Apr 11 Audax Italiano-Necaxa
Apr 18 Alianza Lima-Sao Paulo
Apr 25 Sao Paulo-Audax Italiano
Apr 25 Necaxa-Alianza Lima

Group 3
Mar 13
Cucuta (Col) 1 (Perez 81)
Cerro Porteno (Par) 1 (Ramirez 46)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lunati (Arg)
Sent off: Nunez (Cerro Porteno) 65min

Mar 15
Tolima (Col) 1 (Perlaza 33)
Gremio (Bra) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Furchi (Arg)

Mar 20
Cerro Porteno 2 (Ramirez 52, Da Silva 65)
Cucuta 1 (Perez pen 35)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Pompei (Arg)

Mar 27
Gremio 1 (Tuta 21)
Tolima 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vazquez (Uru)

GROUP 3	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gremio	4	2	1	1	2	1	7
Tolima	4	2	1	1	2	1	7
Cerro Porteno	4	1	1	2	3	4	4
Cucuta	4	0	3	1	2	3	3

Feb 13 Cucuta-Tolima 0-0
Feb 15 Cerro Porteno-Gremio 0-1
Feb 27 Gremio-Cucuta 0-0
Mar 7 Tolima-Cerro Porteno 1-0
Mar 13 Cucuta-Cerro Porteno..... 1-1
Mar 15 Tolima-Gremio 1-0
Mar 20 Cerro Porteno-Cucuta..... 2-1
Mar 27 Gremio-Tolima 1-0
Apr 10 Cerro Porteno-Tolima
Apr 11 Cucuta-Gremio
Apr 24 Gremio-Cerro Porteno
Apr 24 Tolima-Cucuta

Group 4

Mar 14
Velez Sarsfield (Arg) 3 (Castroman 16, Escudero 21, 81)
Internacional (Bra) 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Amarilla (Par)

Mar 22
Emelec (Ecu) 1 (C A Quinonez 89)
Nacional (Uru) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Selman (Chl)
Sent off: M A Quinonez 67min, R G Caicedo 90min (both Emelec); Jaume (Nacional) 67min

Mar 28
Internacional 0
Velez Sarsfield 0
Ref: Larrionda (Uru)
Sent off: Christian (Inter) 27min

GROUP 4	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez Sarsfield	4	2	2	0	5	1	8
Nacional	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Internacional	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Emelec	3	1	0	2	1	4	3

Feb 13 Emelec-Velez Sarsfield 0-1
Feb 21 Nacional-Internacional..... 3-1
Feb 28 Internacional-Emelec 3-0
Feb 28 Velez Sarsfield-Nacional 1-1
Mar 14 Velez Sarsfield-Internacional 3-0
Mar 22 Emelec-Nacional 1-0
Mar 28 Internacional-Velez Sarsfield 0-0
Apr 3 Nacional-Emelec
Apr 10 Emelec-Internacional
Apr 12 Nacional-Velez Sarsfield
Apr 19 Internacional-Nacional
Apr 19 Velez Sarsfield-Emelec

Group 5

Mar 13
UA Maracaibo (Ven) 1 (Fernandez 72)
Real Potosi (Bol) 1 (Pena 64)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hoyos (Col)

Mar 14
Parana (Bra) 0
Flamengo (Bra) 1 (Renato 24)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Gaciba (Bra)
Sent off: Neguete (Parana) 88min

Mar 20
Real Potosi 2 (Monteiro pen 12, 40)
UA Maracaibo 2 (Casseres 36, Ballesteros 55)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Carpio (Ecu)

Mar 21
Flamengo 1 (Souza 87)
Parana 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Simon (Bra)

GROUP 5	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Flamengo	4	3	1	0	7	3	10
Parana	4	2	0	2	6	4	6
Real Potosi	4	0	3	1	5	7	3
UA Maracaibo	4	0	2	2	6	10	2

Feb 14 Real Potosi-Flamengo 2-2
Feb 15 UA Maracaibo-Parana 2-4
Feb 21 Parana-Real Potosi..... 2-0
Feb 21 Flamengo-UA Maracaibo..... 3-1
Mar 13 UA Maracaibo-Real Potosi..... 1-1
Mar 14 Parana-Flamengo..... 0-1
Mar 20 Real Potosi-UA Maracaibo..... 2-2
Mar 21 Flamengo-Parana..... 1-0
Apr 4 UA Maracaibo-Flamengo
Apr 10 Real Potosi-Parana
Apr 18 Flamengo-Real Potosi
Apr 18 Parana-UA Maracaibo

Group 6

Mar 15
LDU Quito (Ecu) 1 (Vera 15)
River Plate (Arg) 1 (Farias 54)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Chandia (Chl)
Sent off: Sambueza (River) 40min; Escalada (LDU) 50min

Mar 20
Caracas (Ven) 0
Colo Colo (Chl) 4 (Sanchez 21, 60, 88, Gimenez 27)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Buitrago (Col)

Mar 29
River Plate 0
LDU Quito 0
Ref: Simon (Bra)

Mar 30
Colo Colo 2 (Fierro 44, Suazo pen 90)
Caracas 1 (Gonzalez 68)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Garay (Per)

GROUP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colo Colo	4	2	0	2	8	6	6
Caracas	4	2	0	2	3	6	6
LDU Quito	4	1	2	1	4	3	5
River Plate	4	1	2	1	3	3	5

Feb 22 Caracas-LDU Quito 1-0
Feb 22 Colo Colo-River Plate..... 1-2
Mar 7 LDU Quito-Colo Colo 3-1
Mar 8 River Plate-Caracas..... 0-1
Mar 15 LDU Quito-River Plate..... 1-1
Mar 20 Caracas-Colo Colo 0-4
Mar 29 River Plate-LDU Quito..... 0-0
Mar 30 Colo Colo-Caracas..... 2-1
Apr 3 Colo Colo-LDU Quito
Apr 5 Caracas-River Plate
Apr 25 River Plate-Colo Colo
Apr 25 LDU Quito-Caracas

Group 7

Mar 14
Toluca (Mex) 2 (Ponce 7, Sanchez 57)
Boca Juniors (Arg) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Larrionda (Uru)
Sent off: Diaz (Boca) 22min

Mar 22
Boca Juniors 3 (Maidana 15, Riquelme 23, Boselli 82)
Toluca 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Amarilla (Par)
Sent off: Cruzalta (Toluca) 40min

Mar 28
Bolivar (Bol) 2 (Leitao Polieri 12, 66)
Cienciano (Per) 3 (Marino 33, Gonzalez Vigil 63, Uribe pen 81)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Laverni (Arg)

GROUP 7	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors	4	2	1	1	4	2	7
Cienciano	4	2	0	2	9	6	6
Toluca	4	2	0	2	5	6	6
Bolivar	4	1	1	2	5	9	4

Feb 14 Bolivar-Boca Juniors 0-0
Feb 21 Cienciano-Toluca..... 1-2
Feb 27 Toluca-Bolivar 1-2
Mar 1 Boca Juniors-Cienciano 1-0
Mar 8 Cienciano-Bolivar 5-1
Mar 14 Toluca-Boca Juniors..... 2-0
Mar 22 Boca Juniors-Toluca..... 3-0
Mar 28 Bolivar-Cienciano 2-3
Apr 4 Cienciano-Boca Juniors
Apr 12 Bolivar-Toluca
Apr 26 Boca Juniors-Bolivar
Apr 26 Toluca-Cienciano

Group 8

Mar 14
Santos (Bra) 3 (Basualdo og 6, Cleber Santana 52, Ze Roberto 69)
Gimnasia La Plata (Arg) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Grance (Par)

Mar 15
Deportivo Pasto (Col) 1 (Rodas 26)
Defensor Sporting (Uru) 2 (Martinez 80, De Souza 90)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Rivera (Per)
Sent off: Jaramillo 46min, J O Ramos 65min (both Pasto); Fernandez 56min, Villa 71min (both Defensor)

Mar 22
Gimnasia La Plata 1 (Leal 88)
Santos 2 (Marcos Aurelio 3, Ze Roberto 90)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)

Mar 28
Defensor Sporting 3 (Ithurralde 16, Morales pen 26, Peinado 90)
Deportivo Pasto 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Gaciba (Bra)

GROUP 8	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	4	4	0	0	7	1	12
Defensor	4	3	0	1	8	2	9
Gimnasia LP	4	1	0	3	4	10	3
Dep Pasto	4	0	0	4	3	9	0

Feb 13 Defensor-Gimnasia LP..... 3-0
Feb 21 Dep Pasto-Santos..... 0-1
Mar 1 Santos-Defensor 1-0
Mar 6 Gimnasia LP-Dep Pasto..... 3-2
Mar 14 Santos-Gimnasia LP..... 3-0
Mar 15 Dep Pasto-Defensor 1-2
Mar 22 Gimnasia LP-Santos..... 1-2
Mar 28 Defensor-Dep Pasto 3-0
Apr 5 Defensor-Santos
Apr 5 Dep Pasto-Gimnasia LP
Apr 19 Gimnasia LP-Defensor
Apr 19 Santos-Dep Pasto

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

ARGENTINA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, March 9
Independiente 2 (Moreno 22, Fredes 90)
Rosario Central 0

Nueva Chicago 0
Gimnasia J 0

Saturday, March 10
Estudiantes 1 (Calderon 85)
Boca Juniors 3 (Palermo 39, 44, 62)

Velez Sarsfield 1 (Moreno y Fabianesi 78)
Quilmes 0

Sunday, March 11
Gimnasia LP 2 (Piatti 54, Pierguidi 83)
Belgrano 2 (Donnet 78, Rios 90)

Godoy Cruz 2 (Torresi 35, Arzuaga 39)
Colon Santa Fe 0

Lanus 1 (Blanco 68)
Racing Club 2 (Lopez 34, Moralez 90)

Newell's Old Boys 1 (Cardozo 44)
Argentinos Juniors 0

River Plate 2 (Ferrari 22, Belluschi 90)
Arsenal 1 (Llama 55)

San Lorenzo 2 (Fernandez pen 36, 67)
Banfield 1 (Gonzalez 8)

Friday, March 16
Arsenal 2 (Re og 15, Ortiz 23)
Newell's Old Boys 3 (Cardozo 20, 68, Cejas 37)

Banfield 0
Estudiantes 2 (Mosquera 18, Pavone 70)

Saturday, March 17
Independiente 1 (Moreno 30)
Lanus 0

Rosario Central 0
San Lorenzo 1 (Fernandez 51)

Sunday, March 18
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Nunez 76)
Racing Club 0

Belgrano 3 (Yllana 12, Rios 58, Donnet 62)
Godoy Cruz 2 (Torresi 37, Miranda 83)

Boca Juniors 5 (Cardozo 1, Palermo 6, 9, 14, 72)
Gimnasia LP 1 (Leguizamon 49)

Colon Santa Fe 1 (Goux 57)
Nueva Chicago 2 (Nahuelpan 36, Higuain 43)

Gimnasia J 0
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Uglessich 66)

Quilmes 0
River Plate 1 (Ortega 90)

Friday, March 23
Nueva Chicago 2 (Nahuelpan 40, Donda 89)
Belgrano 0

Racing Club 2 (Lopez pen 24, 65)
Arsenal 2 (Ortiz 59, Valdemarin 86)

Saturday, March 24
Estudiantes 3 (Piatti 43, Luguercio 77, 86)
Rosario Central 0

Velez Sarsfield 1 (Balvorin 18)
Colon Santa Fe 1 (Enria 89)

Sunday, March 25
Gimnasia LP 0
Banfield 1 (Lujambio pen 13)

Godoy Cruz 0
Boca Juniors 1 (Boselli 83)

Lanus 2 (Acosta 33, Ribonetto 48)
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Carrera 59)

Newell's Old Boys 2 (Arrieta 72, Peralta 86)
Quilmes 2 (Medina 57, Sosa 65)

River Plate 0
Gimnasia J 1 (Turdo 78)

San Lorenzo 4 (Silvera 8, 63, Fernandez 44, Bottinelli 76)
Independiente 3 (Pusineri 16, 68, Denis 40)

ARGENTINA – CLOSING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Lorenzo	7	6	1	0	14	6	19
Boca Juniors	7	5	1	1	17	7	16
River Plate	7	5	0	2	11	6	15
Estudiantes	7	4	2	1	12	6	14
Arsenal	7	4	1	2	16	9	13
Argentinos Jnrs	7	4	0	3	9	6	12
Lanus	7	4	0	3	11	10	12
Velez Sarsfield	7	3	2	2	8	8	11
Newell's OB	7	3	1	3	9	11	10
Godoy Cruz	7	3	0	4	11	8	9
Gimnasia J	7	2	2	3	4	6	8
Gimnasia LP	7	2	2	3	9	13	8
Nueva Chicago	7	2	2	3	5	10	8
Independiente	7	2	1	4	9	12	7
Banfield	7	2	1	4	6	12	7
Colon Santa Fe	7	1	3	3	9	11	6
Racing Club	7	1	3	3	9	12	6
Belgrano	7	1	2	4	6	10	5
Quilmes	7	1	2	4	5	11	5
Rosario Central	7	1	2	4	5	11	5

LEADING GOALSCORERS
8 Martin Palermo (Boca Juniors)
5 Gaston Fernandez (San Lorenzo)
4 Martin Arzuaga (Godoy Cruz)
4 Jose Calderon (Estudiantes)
4 Oscar Cardozo (Newell's Old Boys)

BOLIVIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 11: San Jose 3 Real Mamore 0; Destroyers 4 Blooming 1; Aurora 2 Jorge Wilstermann 3; Bolivar 2 Universitario 3.
Mar 12: Oriente 0 La Paz 0.
Mar 14: Real Mamore 1 Bolivar 1.
Mar 17: La Paz 3 Destroyers 0.
Mar 18: Real Mamore 2 Oriente 3; Universitario 3 San Jose 0; Jorge Wilstermann 1 Bolivar 0; The Strongest 2 Aurora 2; Blooming 4 Real Potosi 2.
Mar 24: Aurora 2 Blooming 0; San Jose 0 Jorge Wilstermann 2.
Mar 25: Real Potosi 0 Destroyers 0; Bolivar 1 The Strongest 1; Oriente 2 Universitario 2; Real Mamore 1 La Paz 1.

BOLIVIA – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
J Wilstermann	4	3	0	1	7	4	9
La Paz	4	2	2	0	5	1	8
Oriente	4	2	2	0	6	4	8
Aurora	4	2	1	1	10	7	7
Universitario	4	2	1	1	10	8	7
The Strongest	3	1	2	0	9	5	5
Real Potosi	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Destroyers	4	1	1	2	6	10	4
San Jose	4	1	0	3	3	6	3
Blooming	4	1	0	3	5	9	3
Bolivar	4	0	2	2	4	6	2
Real Mamore	4	0	2	2	4	8	2

CHILE

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 9: Audax Italiano 1 Huachipato 0; Univ de Chile 0 Cobreloa 1.
Mar 10: Dep La Serena 1 Everton 1.
Mar 11: Dep Concepcion 0 Univ Catolica 1; Antofagasta 1 O'Higgins 1; Santiago Wanderers 3 Dep Melipilla 2; Lota Schwager 2 Univ de Concepcion 4; Cobresal 3 Coquimbo Unido 0; Nublense 0 Colo Colo 2.
Mar 14: Univ de Concepcion 0 Colo Colo 2.
Mar 17: Colo Colo 2 Lota Schwager 2; Palestino 1 Dep Melipilla 1; Union Espanola 2 Nublense 2.
Mar 18: Audax Italiano 0 Antofagasta 0; Cobreloa 3 Dep Concepcion 0; Coquimbo Unido 0 Dep La Serena 1; Everton 1 Santiago Wanderers 1; Huachipato 3 Puerto Montt 1; Univ de Concepcion 3 Cobresal 1.

CHILE – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colo Colo	9	8	1	0	24	6	25
Cobreloa	8	7	0	1	25	5	21
Huachipato	9	5	2	2	14	8	17
U Catolica	8	5	2	1	11	5	17
Audax Italiano	7	4	3	0	14	8	15
U Espanola	9	4	2	3	14	13	14
Dep Melipilla	9	3	3	3	15	12	12
Nublense	9	2	6	1	12	12	12
Everton	9	3	3	3	11	11	12
U Concepcion	8	3	2	3	11	9	11
S Wanderers	9	2	3	4	10	11	9
Dep La Serena	8	2	3	3	8	10	9
Cobresal	9	3	0	6	10	14	9
O'Higgins	8	2	2	4	11	17	8
Puerto Montt	8	2	2	4	10	16	8
Dep Concepcion	8	2	2	4	4	13	8
Palestino	8	1	4	3	9	12	7
Antofagasta	8	1	4	3	6	15	7
U de Chile	6	1	2	3	1	4	5
Coquimbo U'do	9	1	2	6	7	18	5
L Schwager	8	0	4	4	14	22	4

COLOMBIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 10: At Nacional 0 Dep Cali 2.
Mar 11: Bucaramanga 1 Real Cartagena 0; La Equidad 1 Indep Santa Fe 2; Tolima 3 Once Caldas 1; At Junior 2 Cucuta 1; Pereira 0 Dep Pasto 1; America 1 Indep Medellin 1; Chico 1 At Huila 0; Millonarios 1 Quindio 1.
Mar 17: Cucuta 1 At Nacional 1.
Mar 18: Indep Santa Fe 2 Pereira 0; Quindio 1 Tolima 2; Dep Pasto 0 Millonarios 1; Once Caldas 1 At Junior 1; Indep Medellin 1 Bucaramanga 2; At Huila 2 La Equidad 0; Real Cartagena 1 Chico 0; Dep Cali 2 America 2.
Mar 21: Millonarios 5 Indep Medellin 1.
Mar 24: Tolima 1 Dep Pasto 2; Bucaramanga 2 Dep Cali 0.
Mar 25: Indep Santa Fe 1 At Huila 0; Pereira 1 Millonarios 1; La Equidad 2 Real Cartagena 0; At Junior 3 Quindio 2; Chico 2 Indep Medellin 1; At Nacional 2 Once Caldas 0; America 1 Cucuta 2.

COLOMBIA – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cucuta	8	5	2	1	14	7	17
Dep Cali	8	4	3	1	14	8	15
At Nacional	8	4	3	1	14	10	15
Bucaramanga	8	4	3	1	11	7	15
Indep Santa Fe	7	4	2	1	7	4	14
Chico	8	4	1	3	8	6	13
At Junior	8	3	3	2	11	12	12
Tolima	8	3	2	3	12	11	11
Indep Medellin	8	3	2	3	12	15	11
Millonarios	8	2	4	2	9	8	10
Dep Pasto	8	3	1	4	7	10	10
Once Caldas	8	2	2	4	9	14	8
America	7	1	4	2	10	11	7
La Equidad	8	1	4	3	11	13	7
At Huila	8	2	1	5	10	12	7
Quindio	8	2	1	5	9	11	7
Real Cartagena	8	1	4	3	4	7	7
Pereira	8	0	4	4	6	12	4

ECUADOR

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 9: Macara 2 Dep Quito 3.
Mar 10: Dep Azogues 2 LDU Quito 1.
Mar 11: El Nacional 1 Olmedo 2; Imbabura 1 Dep Cuenca 2; Barcelona 0 Emelec 0.
Mar 16: Dep Cuenca 0 El Nacional 2.
Mar 17: Dep Quito 0 Dep Azogues 1.
Mar 18: LDU Quito 4 Imbabura 1; Emelec 0 Macara 0; Olmedo 4 Barcelona 1.

ECUADOR – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olmedo	7	5	2	0	13	5	17
Dep Azogues	7	3	3	1	9	8	12
LDU Quito	7	3	2	2	13	10	11
Dep Quito	7	3	2	2	10	9	11
Dep Cuenca	7	3	1	3	8	8	10
Barcelona	7	2	2	3	8	11	8
El Nacional	7	2	1	4	10	10	7
Imbabura	7	2	1	4	8	11	7
Macara	7	2	1	4	8	11	7
Emelec	7	1	3	3	7	11	6

PARAGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 9: 2 de Mayo 3 Olimpia 1.
Mar 10: 3 de Febrero 1 Sportivo Luqueno 1; Sportivo Trinidense 0 Tacuary 2.
Mar 11: Guarani 1 Sol de America 2; Libertad 1 Nacional 1.
Mar 14: Sportivo Luqueno 0 Libertad 1.
Mar 16: Tacuary 1 12 de Octubre 3.
Mar 17: Nacional 0 3 de Febrero 1.
Mar 18: Olimpia 3 Guarani 1; Sol de America 3 Sportivo Trinidense 3; Sportivo Luqueno 2 2 de Mayo 0.
Mar 23: 2 de Mayo 1 Nacional 4; Sportivo Trinidense 1 Olimpia 0.
Mar 24: 3 de Febrero 1 Libertad 0; Guarani 2 Sportivo Luqueno 2; Tacuary 1 Cerro Porteno 4; 12 de Octubre 2 Sol de America 1.

PARAGUAY – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno	4	4	0	0	11	2	12
3 de Febrero	6	3	2	1	6	5	11
Tacuary	6	3	1	2	7	7	10
Libertad	5	2	2	1	6	4	8
12 de Octubre	5	2	2	1	7	7	8
Trinidense	6	2	2	2	8	11	8
Nacional	6	1	3	2	9	9	6
Luqueno	6	1	3	2	7	7	6
Olimpia	6	1	3	2	9	10	6
Guarani	6	1	2	3	9	10	5
Sol de America	6	1	2	3	7	10	5
2 de Mayo	6	1	2	3	6	10	5

PERU

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 9: Alianza Lima 2 Sport Ancash 0.
Mar 10: Sport Boys 1 Universitario 1.
Mar 11: Alianza Atletico 2 Coronel Bolognesi 0; Melgar 0 Universidad SMP 3; Dep Municipal 3 Total Clean 0; Sporting Cristal 2 Cienciano 2.
Mar 17: Coronel Bolognesi 2 Alianza Lima 0; Universidad SMP 2 Dep Municipal 1.
Mar 18: Universitario 3 Sporting Cristal 1; Cienciano 2 Melgar 3; Total Clean 0 Alianza Atletico 2.
Mar 24: Sport Boys 1 Coronel Bolognesi 0; Melgar 2 Universitario 1; Alianza Lima 3 Total Clean 0.
Mar 25: Alianza Atletico 2 Dep Municipal 1.

PERU – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Melgar	9	6	1	2	16	14	19
Alianza Atletico	9	5	3	1	11	5	18
Alianza Lima	9	5	2	2	17	10	17
Cienciano	8	4	2	2	14	8	14
Univ SMP	8	4	2	2	13	10	14
Sport Boys	8	3	3	2	11	7	12
Universitario	9	3	2	4	13	12	11
Sporting Cristal	8	2	4	2	11	12	10
Dep Municipal	9	2	2	5	12	15	8
Sport Ancash	7	1	4	2	6	6	7
C Bolognesi	9	1	3	5	5	16	6
Total Clean	9	1	0	8	6	20	3

URUGUAY

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 10: Cerrito 1 Danubio 3; Bella Vista 1 Central Espanol 0.
Mar 11: Wanderers 1 Penarol 2; Defensor 0 Rocha 1; Miramar Misiones 2 Nacional 0; Progreso 2 Tacuarembo 2; Rampla Juniors 1 Rentistas 1; Liverpool 1 River Plate 4.
Mar 14: Nacional 1 Progreso 0; Rocha 0 Liverpool 2; Central Espanol 1 Cerrito 1; Tacuarembo 3 Miramar Misiones 2; Danubio 2 Bella Vista 1; Rentistas 2 Penarol 3; Wanderers 4 Rampla Juniors 1.
Mar 17: Cerrito 1 Nacional 2; Progreso 3 Central Espanol 2.
Mar 18: Rampla Juniors 1 Rocha 0; Penarol 3 River Plate 1; Liverpool 2 Wanderers 3; Miramar Misiones 2 Danubio 1; Bella Vista 2 Tacuarembo 0.
Mar 21: Defensor 2 Rentistas 2.
Mar 24: River Plate 2 Defensor 3.
Mar 25: Rentistas 1 Wanderers 4.

URUGUAY – CLOSING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Penarol	7	4	3	0	15	10	15
Danubio	7	4	2	1	11	5	14
M Misiones	7	4	1	2	11	7	13
Tacuarembo	7	3	3	1	16	10	12
Defensor	7	3	3	1	16	14	12
River Plate	7	3	2	2	14	10	11
Bella Vista	7	3	2	2	9	6	11
Wanderers	7	3	1	3	16	12	10
Liverpool	7	3	1	3	12	13	10
Progreso	7	1	5	1	10	10	8
Nacional	7	2	2	3	4	10	8
Rampla Jnrs	7	1	4	2	10	13	7
Rentistas	7	1	3	3	10	14	6
Cerrito	7	1	3	3	8	12	6
Rocha	7	1	1	5	4	11	4
C Espanol	7	0	2	5	3	12	2

VENEZUELA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 10: Monagas 1 UA Maracaibo 0.
Mar 11: Trujillanos 0 Carabobo 0; Dep Tachira 2 Portuguesa 2; Aragua 1 Mineros Guayana 1.
Mar 13: Caracas 1 Zamora 1.
Mar 16: Caracas 0 Dep Tachira 0.
Mar 18: Mineros Guayana 2 Trujillanos 0; Carabobo 1 Monagas 0; Portuguesa 0 Aragua 0.
Mar 21: Mineros Guayana 2 Carabobo 1; Trujillanos 1 Portuguesa 1; Zamora 2 Monagas 2.
Mar 25: UA Maracaibo 2 Aragua 1; Portuguesa 1 Mineros Guayana 0; Carabobo 2 Zamora 0; Monagas 1 Dep Tachira 3.

VENEZUELA – CLOSING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mineros G'ana	14	6	6	2	20	15	24
Caracas	12	5	6	1	15	9	21
Carabobo	14	5	5	4	14	11	20
Zamora	13	5	4	4	17	12	19
Trujillanos	13	4	5	4	16	14	17
UA Maracaibo	11	4	4	3	13	12	16
Dep Tachira	13	2	8	3	14	17	14
Aragua	13	2	7	4	12	16	13
Portuguesa	13	3	3	7	16	21	12
Monagas	14	2	6	6	9	19	12

CENTRAL & NORTH AMERICA

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs - Mar 15
DC United (USA) v Guadalajara (Mex) 1-1
Houston Dynamo (USA) v Pachuca (Mex) 2-0

MEXICO

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 9: Tecos UAG 2 Monterrey 0.
Mar 10: Veracruz 0 Atlante 1; San Luis 2 Santos 3; Tigres 0 Toluca 2; Morelia 0 Pachuca 1; Queretaro 2 Necaxa 0; Atlas 0 Jaguares 1.
Mar 11: America 0 Cruz Azul 0; Pumas UNAM 0 Guadalajara 0.
Mar 14: Atlante 3 Queretaro 1; Santos 0 Tigres 1; Monterrey 1 America 0; Necaxa 1 Pumas UNAM 1; Cruz Azul 3 Morelia 2; Jaguares 0 Veracruz 2.
Mar 17: Atlas 3 Santos 3; Veracruz 0 Toluca 1; Jaguares 2 Atlante 1; Morelia 1 Monterrey 0; San Luis 2 Cruz Azul 0.
Mar 18: Tecos UAG 2 Necaxa 1; America 1 Guadalajara 0; Pumas UNAM 3 Queretaro 3.
Mar 21: Pachuca 3 San Luis 0; Guadalajara 2 Morelia 1; Cruz Azul 3 Tigres 0.
Mar 24: Monterrey 3 San Luis 2; Queretaro 2 Tecos UAG 2; Necaxa 1 America 2; Atlante 1 Pumas UNAM 1.
Mar 25: Santos 1 Veracruz 0; Pachuca 4 Atlas 2; Toluca 0 Jaguares 0.

MEXICO – CLOSING – GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruz Azul	12	7	2	3	16	10	23
Guadalajara	11	6	3	2	18	10	21
Atlas	11	5	3	3	16	11	18
Jaguares	12	4	2	6	12	18	14
Queretaro	12	2	7	3	10	13	13
Necaxa	12	2	4	6	13	21	10

GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pachuca	11	7	3	1	21	9	24
Atlante	12	5	2	5	14	15	17
Tecos UAG	11	4	4	3	17	15	16
San Luis	12	4	2	6	16	19	14
Monterrey	12	3	2	7	10	19	11
Veracruz	12	3	1	8	8	19	10

GROUP 3	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
America	12	6	2	4	19	11	20
Tigres	11	5	2	4	9	12	17
Morelia	12	5	1	6	18	15	16
Pumas UNAM	12	3	7	2	13	11	16
Toluca	11	2	8	1	11	9	14
Santos	12	3	3	6	13	17	12

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st round

1st legs - Mar 2/3/4/5/11; 2nd legs - Mar 16/17/18
Al Hilal (Sud) v Zamalek (Egy)
2-0, 2-2 (agg 4-2)
Al Ittihad (Lby) v AS FNIS (Ngr)
4-1, 1-0 (agg 5-1)
APR (Rwa) v Maranatha (Tog)
2-0, *0-2
AS Adema (Mad) v TP Mazembe (DRC)
2-2, 1-4 (agg 3-6)
Ashanti Gold (Gha) v FAR Rabat (Mor)
2-0, 0-2 (agg 2-2; FAR Rabat 7-6 on pens)
Esperance (Tun) v Zanaco (Zam)
2-0, 4-1 (agg 6-1)
Fello Star (Gui) v Etoile Sahel (Tun)
0-1, 1-4 (agg 1-5)
Grupo Desportivo (Moz) v Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf)
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
Highlanders (Zim) v Al Ahly (Egy)
0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Kallon (SLe) v ASEC Abidjan (IvC)
0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3)
Mangasport (Gab) v JS Kabylie (Alg)
3-1, 0-3 (agg 3-4)

Nasarawa United (Nig) v Ports Authority (Gam)
3-0, 1-2 (agg 4-2)
Saint George (Eth) v Etoile du Congo (Con)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Sewe Sport (IvC) v Cotonsport (Cam)
1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4)
Stade Malien (Mli) v Wydad Casablanca (Mor)
0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)
Young Africans (Tan) v Petro Atletico (Ang)
3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2)

*2nd leg abandoned in 87th minute with Maranatha leading 2-0 when APR walked off in protest at a penalty given against them; tie awarded to Maranatha

CONFEDERATION CUP

1st round

1st legs - Mar 2/3/4/5/10;
2nd legs - Mar 16/17/18/19
Ajesaia (Mad) v Ismaili (Egy)
2-2, 1-6 (agg 3-8)
AS Coton Chad (Chd) v Al Merreikh (Sud)
2-0, 0-5 (agg 2-5)
ASO Chlef (Alg) v ENPPI (Egy)
0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Benfica Luanda (Alg) v DC Motema Pembe (DRC)
4-1, 0-0 (agg 4-1)
Defence (Eth) v ATRACO (Rwa)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Etoile Filante (BuF) v US Ouakam (Sen)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1; Etoile Filante 4-3 on pens)
Hawks (Gam) v Dolphin (Nig)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Kwara United (Nig) v MC Alger (Alg)
3-0, 0-3 (agg 3-3; Kwara United 6-5 on pens)
Mwana Africa (Zim) v InterClube (Ang)
2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
OC Bukavu Dawa (DRC) v Issia Wazi (IvC)
0-2, 0-5 (agg 0-7)
Ports Authority (SLe) v EGS Gafsa (Tun)
3-2, 1-4 (agg 4-6)
Saint-Pauloise (Reu) v Green Buffaloes (Zam)
0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Satellite (Gui) v CS Sfaxien (Tun)
1-3, 0-4 (agg 1-7)
Textil de Pungue (Moz) v Union Douala (Cam)
0-3, 0-3 (agg 0-6)
US Goree (Sen) v HUS Agadir (Mor)
0-0, 2-3 (agg 2-3)

Astres (Cam) v Tema Youth (Gha)
– Tema Youth did not show for 1st leg;
Astres walkover

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Mar 21: Al Wahda (UAE) 4 Al Arabi (Kuw) 1; Al Zawra'a (Irq) 0 Al Rayyan (Qat) 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Wahda	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Al Zawra'a	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Al Rayyan	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Al Arabi	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

Group B

Mar 21: Al Kuwait (Kuw) 0 Pakhtakor (Uzb) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pakhtakor	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Al Hilal (Sau)	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Al Kuwait	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

Esteghlal (Irn) excluded for failing to submit player list in time

Group C

Mar 21: Neftchi (Uzb) 2 Al Karama (Syr) 1; Al Sadd (Qat) 1 Al Najaf (Irq) 4.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Neftchi	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Al Najaf	2	1	0	1	4	2	3
Al Karama	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Al Sadd	2	0	0	2	2	6	0

Group D

Mar 21: Al Ittihad (Syr) 0 Al Ain (UAE) 0; Al Shabab (Sau) 0 Sepahan (Irn) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sepahan	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Al Shabab	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Al Ittihad	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Al Ain	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

Group E

Mar 21: Persik Kediri (Ins) 1 Shanghai Shenhua (Chn) 0; Sydney FC (Aus) 2 Urawa Reds (Jap) 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Urawa Reds	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
Sydney FC	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Persik Kediri	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Shanghai	2	0	0	2	1	3	0

Group F

Mar 21: Chunnam Dragons (SKo) 2 Arema Malang (Ins) 0; Kawasaki Frontale (Jap) 1 Bangkok University (Tha) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kawasaki	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Chunnam	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Bangkok Univ	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Arema Malang	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

Group G

Mar 21: Dong Tam Long An (Vie) 0 Adelaide United (Aus) 2; Shandong Luneng (Chn) 2 Songnam Ilhwa (SKo) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shandong	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Songnam	2	1	0	1	5	3	3
Adelaide	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Dong Tam	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Group winners qualify for quarter-finals.
Bye to quarter-finals: Chonbuk Motors (SKo; holders)

AFC CUP

Group A

Mar 6: Al Nijmeh (Leb) 1 Muscat (Oma) 0; Shabab Al Ordun (Jor) 2 Al Saqr (Yem) 0.
Mar 20: Al Saqr 1 Al Nijmeh 2; Muscat 0 Shabab Al Ordun 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S Al Ordun	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Al Nijmeh	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Muscat	2	0	0	2	0	2	0
Al Saqr	2	0	0	2	1	4	0

Group B

Mar 6: Al Hilal (Yem) 3 Al Wihdat (Jor) 3; Al Muharraq (Bah) 3 MTTU (Tkm) 1.
Mar 20: Al Wihdat 1 Al Muharraq 1; MTTU 3 Al Hilal 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Muharraq	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
MTTU	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Al Wihdat	2	0	2	0	4	4	2
Al Hilal	2	0	1	1	4	6	1

Group C

Mar 6: Dhofar (Oma) 0 Al Ansar (Leb) 0; Nebitchi (Tkm) 0 Al Faisaly (Jor) 0.
Mar 20: Al Ansar 3 Nebitchi 1; Al Faisaly 2 Dhofar 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ansar	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Al Faisaly	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Dhofar	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Nebitchi	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Group D

Mar 6: Negeri Sembilan (Mly) 0 Hoa Pat (Vie) 0; Sun Hei (HK) 2 Victory (Mdv) 0.
Mar 20: Hoa Pat 1 Sun Hei 2; Victory 2 Negeri Sembilan 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sun Hei	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Negeri S	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Hoa Pat	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Victory	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

Group E

Mar 6: New Radiant (Mdv) 0 Happy Valley (HK) 2; Armed Forces (Sin) 0 Mahindra United (Ind) 2.
Mar 20: Happy Valley 1 Armed Forces 4; Mahindra United 1 New Radiant 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mahindra Utd	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Armed Forces	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Happy Valley	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
New Radiant	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

Group F

Mar 6: Mohun Bagan (Ind) 0 Tampines Rovers (Sin) 0; Osotpa M-150 (Tha) 4 Pahang (Mly) 0.
Mar 20: Pahang 1 Mohun Bagan 2; Tampines Rovers 2 Osotpa M-150 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mohun Bagan	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Tampines Rvrs	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Osotpa M-150	2	1	0	1	5	2	3
Pahang	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Group winners and the two runners-up with the best records qualify for quarter-finals

CHINA

Mar 3: Shandong Luneng 5 Liaoning 2; Shanghai Shenhua 0 Beijing Guoan 2; Zhejiang Lucheng 1 Qingdao Zhongneng 1; Wuhan Guanggu 1 Tianjin Teda 1; Shenzhen Kingway 0 Shaanxi Baorong 0.
Mar 4: Changsha Ginde 0 Dalian Shide 1; Xiamen Lanshi 1 Changchun Yatai 3.
Mar 10: Dalian Shide 1 Changchun Yatai 0; Tianjin Teda 2 Shenzhen Kingway 0.
Mar 11: Qingdao Zhongneng 2 Liaoning 0; Beijing Guoan 0 Henan Jianye 0; Shaanxi Baorong 1 Xiamen Lanshi 2; Changsha Ginde 3 Zhejiang Lucheng 2; Shanghai Shenhua 1 Shandong Luneng 0.
Mar 17: Shandong Luneng 3 Qingdao Zhongneng 0; Henan Jianye 0 Shanghai Shenhua 0; Zhejiang Lucheng 2 Changchun Yatai 1; Dalian Shide 1 Shaanxi Baorong 1.
Mar 18: Liaoning 1 Changsha Ginde 0; Wuhan Guanggu 0 Beijing Guoan 0; Xiamen Lanshi 1 Tianjin Teda 2.

CHINA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tianjin	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Dalian	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Shandong	3	2	0	1	8	3	6
Beijing	3	1	2	0	2	0	5
Zhejiang	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Qingdao	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Shanghai	3	1	1	1	1	2	4
Changchun	3	1	0	2	4	4	3
Changsha	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Xiamen	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Liaoning	3	1	0	2	3	7	3
Wuhan	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Henan	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Shaanxi	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Shenzhen	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

JAPAN

Mar 10: Ventforet Kofu 0 Nagoya Grampus Eight 2; Sanfrecce Hiroshima 1 Kashiwa Reysol 1; Jubilo Iwata 2 Oita Trinita 1; Omiya Ardija 0 FC Tokyo 2; JEF United 1 Shimizu S-Pulse 3; Yokohama FC 1 Yokohama F Marinos 0.
Mar 11: Kashima Antlers 0 Gamba Osaka 1; Albirex Niigata 2 Urawa Reds 2; Vissel Kobe 1 Kawasaki Frontale 1.
Mar 17: Oita Trinita 3 Omiya Ardija 1; Urawa Reds 2 Ventforet Kofu 0; Shimizu S-Pulse 0 Kashiwa Reysol 1; JEF United 3 Kashima Antlers 3; Yokohama F Marinos 1 Vissel Kobe 4; Kawasaki Frontale 6 Yokohama FC 0; Gamba Osaka 3 Sanfrecce Hiroshima 0.
Mar 18: Nagoya Grampus Eight 2 Albirex Niigata 0; FC Tokyo 0 Jubilo Iwata 1.

JAPAN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Grampus Eight	3	3	0	0	6	0	9
Gamba Osaka	3	3	0	0	5	0	9
Kawasaki	3	2	1	0	8	1	7
Kashiwa	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
Urawa Reds	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Shimizu S-P	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Jubilo Iwata	3	2	0	1	3	5	6
Vissel Kobe	3	1	1	1	5	3	4
Oita Trinita	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Sanfrecce	3	1	1	1	5	6	4
FC Tokyo	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Yokohama FM	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Yokohama FC	3	1	0	2	2	8	3
Albirex	3	0	2	1	3	5	2
Kashima	3	0	1	2	3	5	1
JEF United	3	0	1	2	4	8	1
Omiya Ardija	3	0	0	3	1	6	0
Ventforet	3	0	0	3	0	5	0

SOUTH KOREA

Mar 3: Songnam 1 Chunnam 1.
Mar 4: Incheon 0 Pohang 1; Seoul 2 Daegu 0; Ulsan 1 Gyeongnam 1; Suwon 2 Daejeon 1; Busan 0 Jeju 1; Gwangju 0 Chonbuk 2.
Mar 10: Gyeongnam 1 Pohang 3; Jeju 1 Songnam 2.
Mar 11: Daegu 1 Incheon 2; Daejeon 1 Ulsan 3; Chonbuk 1 Suwon 1; Busan 2 Gwangju 1; Chunnam 0 Seoul 1.
Mar 17: Incheon 1 Gyeongnam 2; Pohang 1 Daejeon 1; Ulsan 2 Chonbuk 1; Songnam 3 Gwangju 1; Suwon 1 Busan 0.
Mar 18: Daegu 2 Chunnam 2; Seoul 1 Jeju 0.

SOUTH KOREA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Seoul	3	3	0	0	4	0	9
Songnam	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Ulsan	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Pohang	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Suwon	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Chonbuk	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Gyeongnam	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Incheon	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Busan	3	1	0	2	2	3	3
Jeju	3	1	0	2	2	3	3
Chunnam	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Daegu	3	0	1	2	3	6	1
Daejeon	3	0	1	2	3	6	1
Gwangju	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland (NZ)	3	2	1	0	8	2	7
Waitakere (NZ)	2	1	1	0	8	3	4
Mont Dore (NC)	3	0	0	3	1	12	0

Group B

Mar 12: Ba (Fij) 3 Marist (Sol) 2.
Mar 16: AS Temanava (Tah) 2 Marist 1.
Mar 20: Ba 1 AS Temanava 0.
Mar 22: Marist 2 AS Temanava 0.

GROUP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ba	4	3	1	0	7	3	10
AS Temanava	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Marist	4	1	0	3	5	7	3

Group winners qualify for Final

#2: The free-kick taker: Ronaldinho

The Brazilian came top when we asked leading players who was the best

● INTELLIGENCE
"He plays according to his instincts, and they have always served him well. Like all extraordinary players, he has a rather unique appreciation of the game. He sees things more clearly and quickly than the majority."

● FREE-KICKS
"He's a huge threat from a dead-ball situation, whatever the distance. He has the power, accuracy and ability to bend the ball all ways."

● PERSONALITY
"Roni is not only someone who gets huge pleasure from playing. Yes, he's irrepressible and a born entertainer, a player who loves the roar of a big crowd; but winning is even more important to him."

● TECHNIQUE
"The ball is his close friend. Touch, control and balance like his can't be bought. He can manipulate the ball like no other. Players of his genius come along only every now and then in a century. There's no one better at provoking defenders, then, in a split-second, avoiding contact."

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard on Ronaldinho

WHAT THEY SAID

IKER CASILLAS
(REAL MADRID)
"David Beckham [Real Madrid] has a whip on his foot and he hits the ball with such a wicked effect."

CESC FABREGAS
(ARSENAL)
"Ronaldinho [Barcelona]. His style is amazing and the effect he has when he kicks the ball is stunning, even though he is so far away from the goalkeeper."

XABI ALONSO
(LIVERPOOL)
"If Ronaldinho is on form, he can do anything. It is as if he is a machine whenever he takes a free-kick."

GABRIEL HEINZE
(MANCHESTER UNITED)
"Ronaldinho. Goalkeepers tremble when he shoots."

XAVI
(BARCELONA)
"Ronaldinho is capable of scoring with his eyes closed."

FREDERIC KANOUTE
(SEVILLA)
"Ronaldinho is a specialist with an incredible style. He always gives any goalkeeper doubts about where the ball is going to go."

MIKEL ARTETA
(EVERTON)
"Ronaldinho is the best in the world at free-kicks from any distance. It is almost guaranteed that he will get his shot on goal."

LUCIO
(BAYERN MUNICH)
"Juninho Pernambucano [Lyon] can put the ball exactly where he wants. High or low and with incredible dip and swerve on the ball."

ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC
(INTERNAZIONALE)
"The free-kick Ronaldinho scored against Werder Bremen in the Champions League was typical of the man. Only he has the cheek to put the ball under the feet of a jumping wall."

CHRISTOPH METZELDER
(BORUSSIA DORTMUND)
"You can't help but be impressed when Andrea Pirlo [Milan] strokes the ball home with such precision and elegance."

ULRICH RAME
(BORDEAUX)
"Juninho makes a keeper work. Nine times out of 10, his shots are on target. Most of the time from free-kicks I have a rough idea what to expect. With him, I'm totally in the dark."

PAULETA
(PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN)
"Juninho doesn't run up hoping for the best. He thinks he will score. That's important."

TIM WIESE
(WERDER BREMEN)
"Shunsuke Nakamura [Celtic] has a superb left foot. And he gets more dangerous the further out he is, taking keepers by surprise."

CLAUDIO PIZARRO
(BAYERN MUNICH)
"Rogerio Ceni [Sao Paulo] has the ability to get the ball over the wall and bring it down with plenty of back-spin. The fact that he knows what's going through the mind of a keeper must help."

THE VOTES
7... Ronaldinho
3... Juninho Pernambucano
1... Beckham, Nakamura, Pirlo, Rogerio Ceni

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